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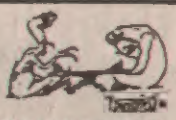

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THE THING THAT JUST LAYS THERE
peeping beauty

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cover contributed by:
JOHN BYRNE
pencils & inks

JOHN BYRNE

Back when I suggested the concept for COMICS INTERVIEW to David Anthony Kraft, there were a million interviews I was dying to do. Twenty-five issues later, there are still a million interviews I'm dying to do. It's funny, too, because some of the early fears a few readers voiced were that COMICS INTERVIEW would quickly run out of interview subjects, or worse yet, no one would have anything interesting to say and the magazine would become boring and redundant. Well, judging by the response from readers and critics alike, those fears proved to be totally unfounded. In fact, COMICS INTERVIEW is the only magazine about comics that I not only enjoy, but read from cover to cover every issue.

Well, one of those interview subjects I was dying to do was none other than good ol' John Byrne. To be honest, I really didn't know what I was getting into with this interview. I've created a monster. This is without a doubt the longest John Byrne interview — and perhaps the longest interview concerning comic books — ever published. And that's after John, David and I got through hacking away at it! And I didn't even get all the way through my notes when I finally ran out of tape. My idea, at the time, seemed simple enough. Inspired by old interviews with either John Lennon or Paul McCartney, in which they were asked to comment on their contributions to their supposedly collaborative efforts song by song, John and Paul's answers often offered new and interesting insights into their work and themselves. I thought I merely had to rattle off some titles and issue numbers and I'd have a nice little interview with John. Well, at least that was the plan. John and I went off on so many tangents that we were lucky to cover most of his work on the FANTASTIC FOUR. Fortunately most of the tangents, at least the ones we left in, turned out to be interesting as well.

Also, I'd like to make a confession about this particular interview. I blathered on a bit more than I normally do. My guess is that because of my tremendous respect for John's work and my involvement in many of the FF issues we discussed, I was a bit nervous. I wanted this interview to turn out especially well and developed something like stage fright while conducting the interview. Thankfully, I had my notes and John was articulate enough for the two of us. I still don't know what came over me, considering how long I've known John. I still remember the days when my then-roommate Duffy Vohland used to show me early Byrne pages he had just inked either for a fanzine or as sample pages for some potential professional assignment. I must admit that I didn't think much of John's work back then. But it wasn't long before then-Marvel editor Tony Isabella gave John his first Marvel assignment — a story scripted by David Anthony Kraft, no less. Years passed and John kept getting better and better. Now John's the most successful writer/artist currently working in comics in this country. His fans are legion and I'm proud to be one of them.

— Jim Salicrup

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: John Byrne
Residence: Connecticut
Born: 6 July 1950
Occupation: Genius
Most Amount of Money Earned In a Single Year: More wealth than you can possibly imagine.
Hat Size: 9½
Favorite Time of Day: Dinnertime

"I said to Rich Buckler, 'I'm John

JIM SALICRUP: *John, when did you first start to think that you wanted to write and draw the FANTASTIC FOUR?*

JOHN BYRNE: Well, I was starting to get delusions of adequacy as a writer during about the last year and a half on the X-MEN, and I guess it was in San Diego when **Jim Shooter** mentioned that **Doug Moench** was going to be leaving the FF. And so I kind of jumped up and said "Me, me... can I, can I write it?" The idea being that I would write it and **Bill Sienkiewicz** would continue to draw it. And of course that was instantly followed by me quitting the X-MEN, saying "I think I want to draw this, too; I know these guys, I drew it once before... "

JIM: *I was in California at the time... so when I left, I knew Doug would be going off the book. We talked about you writing it and/or drawing it. I think Bill has never forgiven me for taking him off the book. He was very passionate about drawing it. He was just starting... but I thought he was really better at the MOON KNIGHT stuff.*

JOHN: He called me at one point. He thought I had somehow sabotaged him, and I explained that I just put it in **Shooter**'s lap and said, "Hey, I'd like to draw this thing as well; I would also like to work with Bill and not have him removed for my sake..." **Shooter**, I guess, agreed with what you just said, that MOON KNIGHT was more the ideal **Bill Sienkiewicz** book, and I was closer to the FF in more ways...

JIM: *Well, before you ever took on the FF, you had drawn this sample job that we'll be printing along with this interview. Tell me all about* that, *John.*

JOHN: That was done, I guess, in '74, in the days when **Rich Buckler** was doing the FANTASTIC FOUR, and doing it in a pseudo-**Kirby** style. So I said, "Well, if that's what they want, I can give it to them."

JIM: *I was indirectly responsible for that. I was just like a... I don't know* what *I was at Marvel, sort of what they call an intern now.*

JOHN: "Flunkie" in those days!

JIM: *Yeah, flunkie, messenger, whatever. Rich was working in a small office, in the back of Marvel, at the time. The FF was always a book I liked a lot, and I was telling Rich that Kirby had really defined these characters. As far as I'm concerned, the book* had *to be drawn as if Kirby was drawing it. Rich took that to mean that this was a book that you should draw just like Kirby, and I think a lot of people thought that that was company policy, that he was* told *to draw like Jack Kirby, or* all *artists were coming in and being told, "Draw like this guy, draw like that guy... "*

JOHN: It was also the problem that they would often say "Think **Kirby**," meaning Jack's storytelling, Jack's power, Jack's this, Jack's that, but *not* necessarily Jack's line quality or exact technique. If you say, "Think **Kirby**" to a young artist, or even an artist who's been around for a while — 'cause artists are notoriously paranoid — you say "think **Kirby**" and you're going to *get* imitation **Kirby**.

John Byrne

JIM: *As I recall, this job was sitting in Tony Isabella's files for some reason, I don't know how it got there...*

JOHN: Tony was my official link to Marvel, via **Duffy Vohland.**

JIM: *I remember you made friends with Rich in your inimitable style by, at a convention —*

JOHN: Yes, by telling him I was after his job.

JIM: *Rich remembers that you came up to him and told him you would indeed be drawing the FANTASTIC FOUR.* (Laughter.)

Jim Salicrup

JOHN: Well, not quite, not quite. I introduced myself to him, and said, "I'm **John Byrne** and I want your job." *(Laughter.)* And of course the fact that I was walking around with an issue of FANTASTIC FOUR under my arm didn't help. I guess from the other side, from what I heard is, he immediately went to **John Romita** and said, "I don't want this guy working anywhere *near* Marvel." Now, we know, times have changed...

JIM: *He's back, and Marvel's got him. Let's see... when did you first start just drawing the FF?*

JOHN: My first issue of the FF was #209. I did about ten issues from **Marv Wolfman's** plots, two from my own...

JIM: *Galactus was in #210, right?*

JOHN: Something like that. It was a good place to start.

JIM: *You created Terrax in #211.*

JOHN: Marv told me who Terrax was and I came up with what he looked like. He said "I want this big guy who controls rock, and has a big axe." I think it was after he *saw* him that he said "We're going to call him Terrax."

JIM: *I get it: Terra, Axe.*

JOHN: Dropped the "X," had a sex change, joined the TEEN TITANS...

JIM: (Laughter.) *Well, how involved were you in the plotting?*

JOHN: Not at all, that first time out. That was one of the things that eventually led to me leaving the book. I was being handed plots and, towards the end, it was musical writers. I didn't know who was plotting what for who from one issue to the next. I finally said, "*Stabilize* this and maybe I'll come back..."

JIM: *What were you doing, layouts?*

JOHN: No, breakdowns. Although they were, by the end of the first half-dozen books, pretty close to full pencils. I was really getting into it.

JIM: *In #216 you appeared on the first page.*

JOHN: Probably.

JIM: *When did you start putting yourself into the stories?*

JOHN: Well, as a person standing in the background, I've been in a lot of stuff. Everybody these days is so used to seeing me that if they see a blonde guy with a beard, it's *automatically* me, whether he's eight feet tall, or whatever. *(Laughter.)* I guess the first time I did it blatantly was at **Nick Cuti's** behest in the first ROG 2000 story, where he named Rog's creator after me — Burns — and said, "If you want to make him look like you, well, go ahead." Well, *hey*, am I going to resist *this*? Of course not.

JIM: *In #217, there was an early appearance of The Dazzler. Were you involved in the creation of The Dazzler at all?*

JOHN: No. It's funny. I go to conventions

Photo: © Jon Zimmerman

Byrne and I want your job.' *(Laughter.)*"

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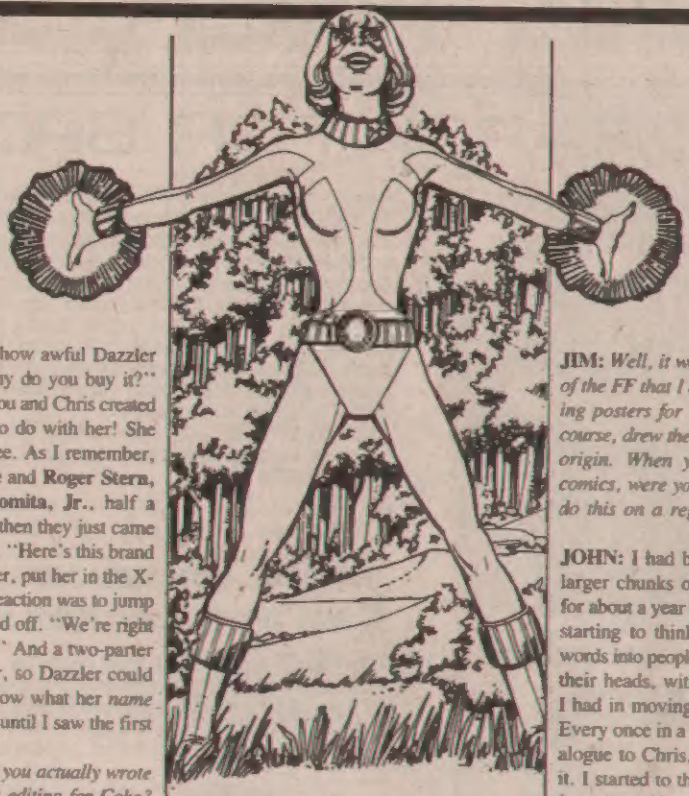


and people groan about how awful Dazzler is, and I say, "Then why do you buy it?" and they say, "Because you and Chris created her." We had nothing to do with her! She was created by committee. As I remember, it was **Dickie McKenzie** and **Roger Stern, Frank Miller, John Romita, Jr.**, half a dozen other people, and then they just came to Chris and me and said, "Here's this brand new full-fledged character, put her in the X-MEN. *Now*." And our reaction was to jump up and down and be pissed off. "We're right in the middle of a story!" And a two-parter turned into a three-parter, so Dazzler could be in it. I didn't even know what her *name* was, other than Dazzler, until I saw the first issue of her own book.

JIM: *The first FF stories you actually wrote were the ones that I was editing for Coke?*

JOHN: Yes.

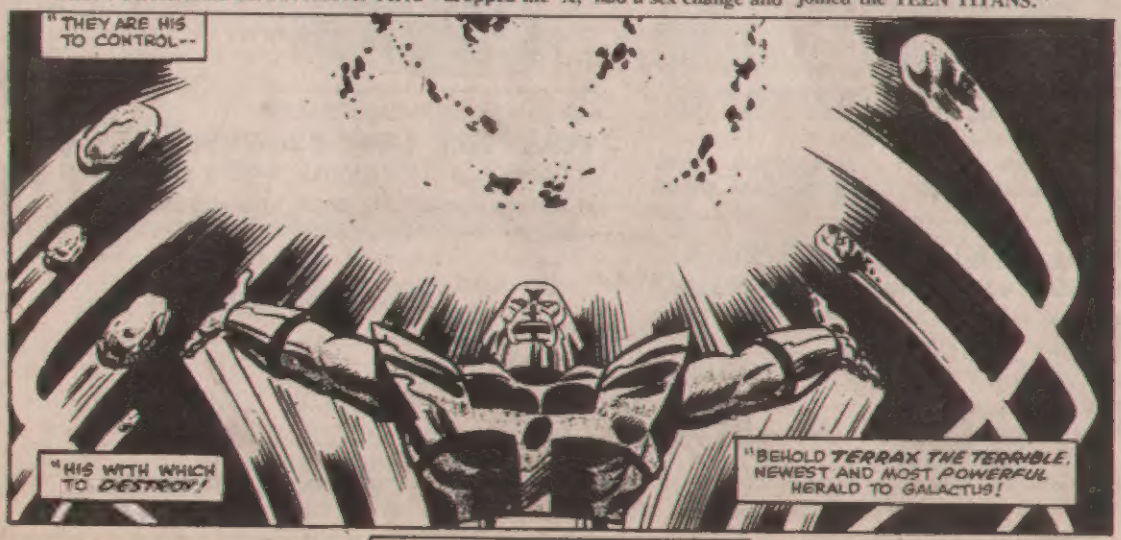
JIM: *As part of a promotion, Coca-Cola wanted to give away some free Marvel comics, and I was to edit them. I got you to do the FANTASTIC FOUR one; THE HULK was by Doug Moench, Steve Ditko and Al Milgrom; and SPIDER-MAN was by Ralph Macchio and Jim Mooney. I told everyone that Coke wanted these... a little bit easier to read and less violent than the average Marvel comic. And even though they approved all three of the plots, when they actually saw the stories, they felt they were a lot rougher than anything that Coca-Cola wanted to be associated with!*

JOHN: I did a very "Saturday Morning" version. It was all cute aliens, and The Thing didn't hit anything but a robot. Maybe it bounced too violently. I mean, what *did* they want? That the FF go to a spelling bee?

JIM: *Well, it wound up being the first issue of the FF that I edited and we wound up doing posters for Coca-Cola instead. You, of course, drew the FF poster featuring the FF's origin. When you were writing the Coke comics, were you thinking that you'd like to do this on a regular basis?*

JOHN: I had been contributing larger and larger chunks of the plots on the X-MEN, for about a year at that point, and I was really starting to think that I could probably put words into people's mouths, and thoughts into their heads, with about as much alacrity as I had in moving them from panel to panel. Every once in a while I would contribute dialogue to Chris, and he would actually use it. I started to think, "Ah-hah, it worked, I *knew* I could write this scene..." And, of course, I had written in disguise before that. I had re-written all the DOOMSDAY PLUS ONEs for Charlton, after the first one. I spoke with **Joe Gill** on the phone, said that I had changed a couple of lines of dialogue in that one. He said he didn't mind. He thought I was doing a fine job, and if that was what it took, go ahead. So I just went crazy with it, and tried to sort of Marvel-Universe the Charlton stuff...

Below: Terrax from the FF. Above: Terra "dropped the 'X,' had a sex change and joined the TEEN TITANS."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JIM: *Even before you [illegible] MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE.*

JOHN: The Thing Meets The Thing. What an *original* concept. *(Laughter.)* We'll have to do that again some time.

JIM: *It worked out real well. Roger Stern helped.*

JOHN: Well, he came up with the title.

JIM: *You've known Roger forever and ever.*

JOHN: And ever.

JIM: *How would you describe your working relationship?*

JOHN: We've known each other for close to ten years now. We've always had an almost symbiotic relationship as far as writing. We think along very similar lines. He takes stuff from me, and I take stuff from him, and he takes my "no"s or I take his "no"s.

JIM: *Actually, that will be a lot clearer in print. I just heard "no"s as meaning your nose.*

JOHN: Your nose, yes . . . see how much your nose knows.

JIM: *When you were working with him as an editor on that MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE job, he was involved with polishing your [illegible].*

JOHN: Yes, and as I say he changed the title . . . I called it my standard time-travel title, and he changed it to "Remembrance of Things Past." That instantly generated all the variations on The Thing titles that I've come up with since then. I seem to remember the only problem, the single problem I ever had with Roger, was when he was in charge of re-scripting that Coca-Cola job to make it into a cohesive whole. He changed the credits on it so that I was "**John Byrne**, writer & penciller," and then it became "**Joe Sinnott**, inker & embellisher, **somebody or other**, colorist & something . . ." and when I saw this I got outraged. I said, "Dammit, I had two credits because *I* did *two* jobs. Now everybody else has two credits as well! What's going on here!?" *(Laughter.)* And that was probably the only disagreement I ever had with Roger.

JIM: *He took it well. Let's see, then there were ten Moench and Sienkiewicz issues, and then with #242 [illegible] what you've been doing. I was a Cable [illegible] do with that issue's cover copy. Then left off . . .*

JOHN: "World's Greatest Comic Magazine!" *(Laughter.)* The entire run of the magazine since issue #3 had the line. Was this some kind of a comment on **Byrne's** work? I don't know.

JIM: *I think it was just that in production, they figured, "Well, we can take this out to make room for the artwork." Not anything editorial. That issue had lots of changes, for an issue called "Back To Basics."*

That was inked by you, or "Born Hero." Originally it was supposed to be inked by Terry Austin, since at that point, everyone's thinking was, "Well yeah, John Byrne pencils something, we must have Terry Austin ink it." And what happened was my fault. I was so busy at that time, I was editing AVENGERS, FF, and X-MEN – plus all the various characters from those that had their own books, plus SPIDEY SUPER STORIES [illegible] not to also edit another issue of the FF each month as you were turning them in, because I was trying to get all those other books out.

JOHN: I was also very much ahead . . . five months ahead.

JIM: *There was an [illegible] those out, and Terry had planned to receive issues on a certain day, and lo and behold he didn't. He got paid for his time, he didn't have any other work or something, but he decided, "I'm not going to bother with this, and then I think I called you and said, "Who are we going to get to ink you?" (Laughter.) You're such a demanding one . . . only the finest inkers will do . . . and we decided you'd*

The Thing meets The Thing in MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE #50.

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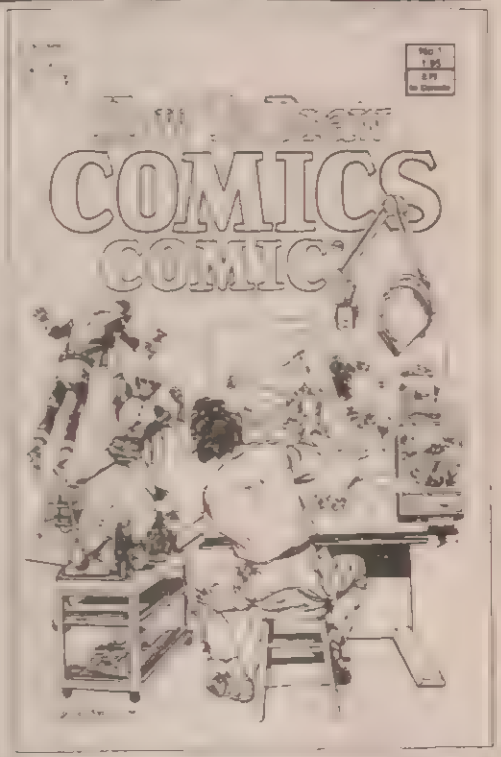

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"To kill off doesn't have to mean death."

be a good choice. We compromised and had Terry ink the covers.

JOHN: He inked the covers for awhile, and then I sort of just *grew* into the covers.

JIM: *THE COMICS JOURNAL quoted you as saying I was your "trained editor." (Laughter.) Yet, early on, there were several plots you had done for the FF that I threw out for various reasons. You can tell me what were those plots, John?*

JOHN: Well, let me think . . . I had turned in about six plots, I remember, that were for **Sienkiewicz** to pencil . . .

JIM: *One was a fight one . . . it was a Thing and Sasquatch?*

JOHN: It was a Thing and somebody, that eventually I ended up re-interpreting as an issue of THE THING. I don't think it was Sasquatch.

JIM: *Colossus?*

JOHN: I can't remember. But there was a Puppet Master story.

JIM: *In one I rejected, Alicia was brutally beaten.*

JOHN: Everyone was getting brutally beaten.

JIM: *And you wanted to kill off Franklin.*

JOHN: Well not *per se*, no, that was just one of the things that **Shooter** had suggested would really shake that book up — if we killed Franklin — and of course when I said "Maybe we'll kill Franklin," that got into the press: "They're gonna kill Franklin," and "They're gonna kill Alicia." To kill them off to me just means get them out of the book, it doesn't have to mean a physical death. I'm glad I didn't get rid of either of those characters. It turned out real neat in the end. There was a Puppet Master story; there was an Annihilus story, there was some kind of big fight story. I think part of the Puppet Master story, and most of the others went away. The only one that really survived was the Puppet Master — the Annihilus story kind of got combined into a different story altogether in THE THING.

JIM: *How do you approach plotting on any given issue?*

JOHN: It varies. In the early days, I was doing really detailed plots. I would sit down and draw twenty-two squares on the page and figure out everything in advance, and work it back and forth. And then, progressively I started doing less and less of that, so that now I have the general outline of what I want to do in my head — I have the high points that I want to hit, and I just sit down and start drawing. And with each day's worth of work, which is four pages, I figure, "Okay, I've got to hit this point within these four pages and that gives me this amount of pages to hit the next point that I want to hit," and I find that this works much, much better for me than breaking it all down in great detail. Because some of the best "bits" that I have done have been things that I realized a page, or a page-and-a-half before, that this is the opportunity to do such and such, and if I had copiously detailed plots, it would eliminate that spontaneity. So these days I just sit down and start with blank page one, and hopefully end up at blank page twenty-two.

JIM: *Well, there are a lot of "bits" in your first issue as writer. There's the introduction of the characters, similar to the first issue of the FF.*

JOHN: Same order. Subconsciously, they appeared in the same order as they had in the first issue.

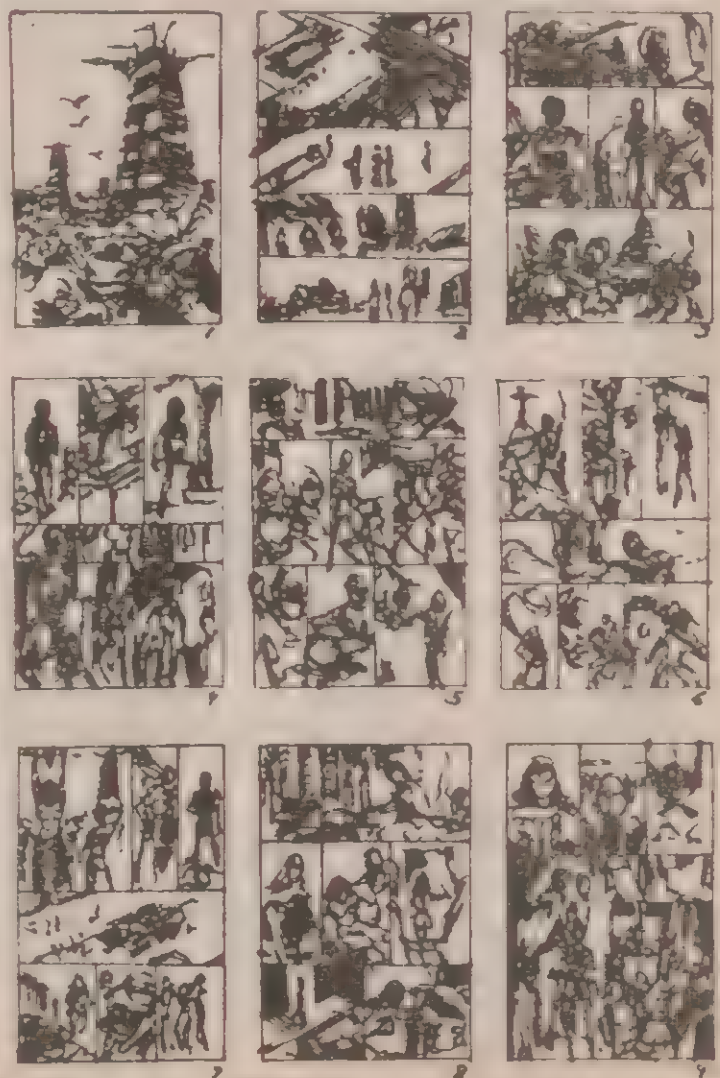
JIM: *I didn't notice that. But some nice stuff such as Sue's new hairstyle, The Thing seeing THE ELEPHANT MAN on Broadway, also right away starting in with a leaner.*

JOHN: Yes, a skinny Mr. Fantastic — Mr Anorexic?

JIM: *You called it "Back To Basics," but here the "basics" was your introducing everybody to.*

JOHN: The "Back To The Basics" was more in the sense of "Who are these guys"; how do they interrelate, and what kind of stories do they get involved in? Also, whenever I do a book, I pick one character to be the one I'm going to "adopt" — my character

A COMICS INTERVIEW Exclusive: Examples of an early thumbnail "really detailed" plot from Byrne's sketchbook. "I would draw squares and figure out everything in advance." Can you identify this story?



"I made The Thing a tragic hero. He

in the book. And I picked Sue. Really nothing had been done with Sue in twenty years.

JIM: *With The Thing, you started to get away from the very defined...*

JOHN: He had turned into Fuzzy Bear over the years, even **Joe Sinnott** had pointed that out to me. So I thought, let's try and make this guy look more like a "thing," and I went back to some of the early **Kirby** stuff, the way he was shaped in issue #1 and #2. There was no clearly defined human anatomy there, he was basically a starfish, and I went back to that.

JIM: *Remember the issue where the FF are turned into monsters, and The Thing turns into a monster?*

JOHN: Yes, a monstrous Thing. I read that issue and went, "Wait a minute. What's wrong with this picture?"

JIM: (Laughter.) *Also you went back to the thicker, black costume collars. Any particular reason?*

JOHN: First, I'd always liked them. Issue #5 was the last time we saw them. Issues #3, #4 and #5 had them, and then all of a sudden, in issue #6, they were gone. And the whole thing has always been that in the Marvel Universe, whenever somebody changes their costume, we do a story about it, however minor the change is. *(Laughter.)* And we'd *never* had a story about why the FF's collars had gotten skinnier. And so I said, okay, they never did. And *bang* — back to the big wide collars. They'd turned into these funny little T-shirt things, low down on their necks, and they just looked like Dr Dentons or something. Back in issue #3, when they first wore the costumes, the collars were turtlenecks, they were very wide.

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JUST WAIT AND SEE, SISTER! THE FANTASTIC FOUR HAVE ONLY BEGUN TO FIGHT!
THE THREE OF YOU CAN'T DO IT ALONE! IT'S TIME FOR THE THING TO TAKE A HAND!
IT'LL TAKE MORE THAN ROPES TO KEEP MISTER FANTASTIC OUT OF ACTION!

From the cover of FF #1, showing Jack Kirby's early version of The Thing.

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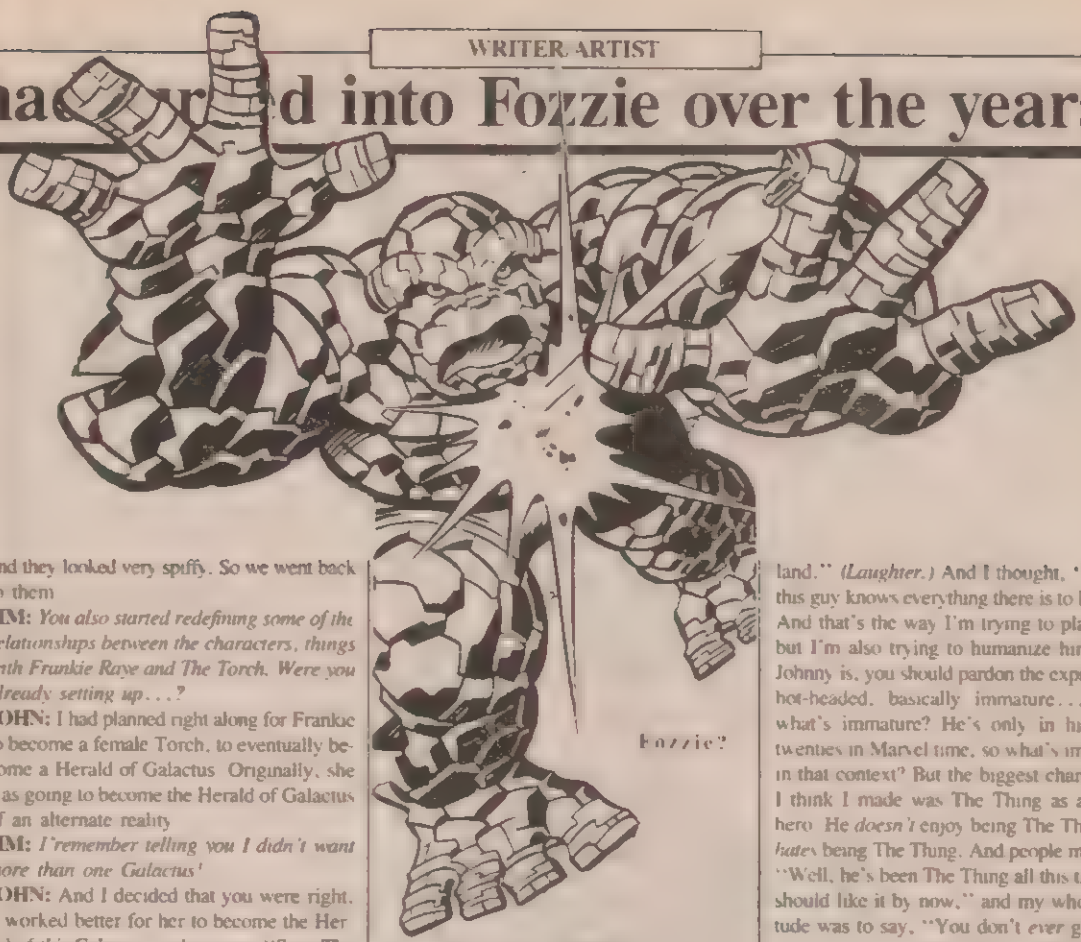
ha[illegible]d into Fozzie over the years."



Fozzie?

and they looked very spiffy. So we went back to them

JIM: *You also started redefining some of the relationships between the characters, things with Frankie Raye and The Torch. Were you already setting up...?*

JOHN: I had planned right along for Frankie to become a female Torch, to eventually become a Herald of Galactus. Originally, she was going to become the Herald of Galactus of an alternate reality.

JIM: *I remember telling you I didn't want more than one Galactus!*

JOHN: And I decided that you were right. It worked better for her to become the Herald of *this* Galactus, and to quote "Save The Earth" unquote.

JIM: *This was followed by The Torch in a solo story... did you want to do a solo story with each character?*

JOHN: Yes. It took the longest to get to The Thing. Because The Thing had his own book, there was no real rush to do a solo story for a character that gets a solo story every month. But we eventually did Sue in the "Childhood's End" story. Somebody pointed out that whole nightmare story, up on the moon, was basically a Reed solo story, in that it all took place inside Reed's head. That's the Mr. Fantastic way of doing the solo story — all intellectual.

JIM: *At that point, you must have thought about each character, or had definite ideas — how did those evolve?*

JOHN: I had very clear ideas of who I wanted these people to get back to being, and I felt that they had become somewhat homogenized. Like caricatures — instead of reacting like people, they would have these stock reactions, all reacting in this way. And I wanted to look back and remember the way **Stan Lee** and **Jack Kirby** had evolved the characters, remembering that when I had read the book as a kid, I never really liked Reed that much because he always seemed like such a cocky son-of-a... you know, he always had an answer, and was never surprised by anything. And I thought, "Let's get back to that. I'll try to make him somebody I like in the process." In researching it, I discovered that the whole thing of Reed never being surprised by anything goes right back to issue #1. They go to Monster Island and they're attacked by a giant three-headed creature which Reed lassoes and tosses out to sea, and then says, "I had *heard* there was a giant three-headed creature guarding this island." *(Laughter.)* And I thought, "Whoa, this guy knows everything there is to know!" And that's the way I'm trying to play him, but I'm also trying to humanize him. And Johnny is, you should pardon the expression, hot-headed, basically immature... well, what's immature? He's only in his early twenties in Marvel time, so what's immature in that context? But the biggest change that I think I made was The Thing as a tragic hero. He *doesn't* enjoy being The Thing, he *hates* being The Thing. And people may say, "Well, he's been The Thing all this time, he should like it by now," and my whole attitude was to say, "You don't *ever* get used to being The Elephant Man." Especially if you didn't start out that way. To literally wake up one morning as Ben Grimm, monster, that's something that you never get used to.

"I went back to the early Kirby stuff."

JIM: *Well, that became more confusing when you tied it in to The Thing, himself, being responsible for his remaining The Thing, that he had a mental block...*

JOHN: That goes back to what Stan and Jack were doing. I forget which issues it was, particularly, but there were two cases, the first time The Thing met Alicia, where he's changed back to Ben Grimm, and he changes back into The Thing while he's holding her, and she reacts, "Oh, it *is* you, it's the same wonderful man..." and he thinks, "Nuts, she likes me better as The Thing..." And then several issues after that there was a scene where Reed is chasing Ben around the Baxter Building with this formula saying, "This will change you back, Ben!" and Ben says, "Get away from me! Alicia loves me as The Thing!" Well, this is a serious psychological hang-up for somebody to have — that he hates being this awful monster, but the woman he loves doesn't love him unless he *is* the awful monster. And so it seemed like a natural thing, especially when I wanted to re-emphasize the tragic-hero element and say well okay, let's make the beautiful girlfriend the *reason* that he's a tragic monster, because as long as he has this beautiful girlfriend he will *always* be a monster.

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"On X-MEN I was afraid to make changes."

JIM: *It worked out real well.*

JOHN: I like it. Even the fans seem to have largely accepted it.

JIM: *I think lots of fans might have preconceptions of what working for Marvel is like. That you can't change the characters, or you can't do anything, you have to maintain a status quo, and all that stuff. Did any of that, even though you had been working for Marvel for quite a while, did any of that affect you?*

JOHN: Not on the FANTASTIC FOUR, no. It had affected me more on the X-MEN. I was afraid to really make changes, but on the FANTASTIC FOUR **Shooter** had, in so many words, said to take it and do what I wanted with it, short of killing them all off. So, on the FF I felt completely free to do whatever I wanted to. In fact, I had to pull the reins on myself a couple of times.

JIM: *In issue #239, you gave me credit on the letters page for helping with a plot...*

JOHN: "The Man With The Power."

JIM: *All I did was rattle off a few bits of plot, which was inspired by the FF, around when Chic Stone was inking it and it had all these one-part stories.*

One little bit... was the scene of Reed and Sue walking around, and some girl is dropping off... and "Excuse me, dear," he just stretches out and grabs her...

JOHN: Yeah, that was yours.

JIM: *Well, at that point, Jim didn't want to see long multi-part stories. Even if they're great stories, if a reader picked up part five, and had never read the FANTASTIC FOUR before, it should make sense without the previous four parts. If the reader couldn't figure out who the characters were, it was a failure.*

JOHN: Every issue is the first issue for somebody.

JIM: *I think a lot of resistance at that time came from people who felt that they had to use cliche situations to always re-introduce the characters. You were coming up with the most interesting ways of re-introducing the Fantastic Four.*

JOHN: I like to build to the first appearance of the characters, to start with, which immediately affects my approach. I don't like the whole thing of Superman flying to the rescue on page one, and then that little mini-adventure ends by page three, and then we go do some Clark Kent stuff. I would rather find a dramatic way of doing the Clark Kent stuff, so when he opens the shirt, or runs into the phone booth, this is a *dramatic event*, and we haven't defused it by starting with Superman. In the FANTASTIC FOUR, I think the super powers are less important than the people, so I like to set up an ordinary day-to-day situation that they might find themselves involved in. When you've got the greatest scientific mind on Earth and all that kind of stuff, ordinary day-to-day situations can be pretty outlandish. And then you introduce some element where they need to use their powers. And Reed, for example, is really easy to do, 'cause I figure the whole Baxter Building, may it rest in peace, was built to his scale, so that all you need for Reed is him leaning over a microscope while adjusting a dial — but the dial is in the next room. And he's instantly using his powers, you can tell what he's doing, and he's not battling a super villain in order to introduce the using of his powers. Stan and Jack used to have The Torch standing around in flames, you know, "Here I am standing here, on fire." And that introduces what this guy does... the only one I've really had trouble with has been Sue, because I realize I've gone six, seven issues at a time without her turning invisible. She uses her force-fields and stuff, but having force-fields is not really a good reason to call somebody the Invisible Girl. *(Laughter.)* So it is a bit of a trick to try and have her use her invisibility every issue. But, nobody seems to be complaining. Now they will.

JIM: (Laughter.) *In other words, the art work is not just illustrating literally what the plot is... the artist has to almost be a major part of the writing, in* characterizing. *What you do so well is pay attention to detail. If a character has a room, it's not just an ordinary room, there's a lot of their life there...*

JOHN: At conventions, when kids ask me about The **John Byrne** Way of Drawing... I say there's really nothing more to it than trying to make even the most minor character fully realized. You know, we go and visit our attorney's office and I always say, "Well, who is this guy?" This is a guy who, even if he's only going to appear in three panels, should have a wife and kids and hobbies and stuff... I almost always put a bowling trophy in somebody's office. *(Laughter.)* This is what he does, he goes out and he bowls; pic-

"We eventually did Sue in 'Childhood's End.'' From FF #245.

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"The first issue of the FF happens *right now.*"

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ture of the wife and kids: I try to figure what kind of pictures he'll have hanging on the wall, this kind of stuff, 'cause it's a subliminal thing that feels good, adds greater depth to a character, than just "Here I am in full bloom."

JIM: *Also, just remembering to use human characters more, for the contrast — you do that very well. And you're constantly playing with the characters. Like in issue #236, for example. How did that story come about?*

JOHN: When I took over the book, I said, "You realize the fifth issue I'm going to do as a writer, a full-fledged writer on this thing, is going to be the twentieth anniversary issue of the book?" **Shooter** said, "I trust you. All I want from you is FANTASTIC FOUR: THE MOVIE." The challenge, then, was twofold. I had to do the definitive FANTASTIC FOUR story, such that if you'd never even heard of these guys before you could read this issue and come out of it knowing who they are and how they got that way. It also had to be worthy of being a twentieth anniversary issue — and the most important thing to me, for that particular approach, was that it had to be a twentieth anniversary issue that never once said it had been twenty years. So I wanted to do something that celebrated twenty years of FANTASTIC FOUR history without them all going around saying, "We're old." *(Laughter.)* That was my whole approach. The best way to do it, it seemed to me, was to turn it into an origin story done sideways. So everybody who's read the origin before will *not* go, "Ho-Hum," and skip the first three pages. And everybody who's never heard of these guys will get the origin, but not necessarily just, "Boom, here's the origin." I didn't just do, "Boom, here's the origin," until one panel, about half way through the story, when Reed finally pulls it all together, the origin, in sequence

JIM: *Well...* (Laughter.) *...one of the things you must enjoy doing, John, is trying to sneak in lots of little clues that*

JOHN: That it's only been seven years

JIM: *That clearly indicate the FF have only been around for seven years. How can anyone stop you from doing this, John?*

JOHN: No one can stop me. *(Laughter.)* I'm an unstoppable juggernaut

JIM: *Well, I didn't mind if you produced stories that hinted that it had only been seven years since the FF began, as long as you weren't blatant about it. But you got quite a few past me.* (Laughter.) *Some would be in the flashbacks, like a late model car, a pushbutton phone...*

JOHN: The most blatant one I've done of recent vintage was in retelling the Dr. Doom origin and having him fly to the United States in a jet. *(Laughter.)* You know, like a 707...

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JIM: *Well, why John? Why, why, why?* (Laughter.)

JOHN: Because if we don't do that, these characters are going to get unmanageably *old* And there's no way to get around that I hear from fans all the time, I'll get letters, or at conventions people will say, "The obvious solution to this is that they were zapped by cosmic rays, so they don't age." And I'd say, "That's really terrific, and that also explains Alicia, and J. Jonah Jameson, and Aunt May, and everybody else..." So, what I do these days, when somebody says it's been twenty years, or twenty-five years almost, I point out that every single comic you've ever read — unless it's some kind of specific twist done for the story — is written in the present tense So every comic you read happens when you read it. It didn't happen five years ago, it didn't happen ten years ago... the first issue of the FANTASTIC FOUR happens *right now.* When you read it Even if you've read it a hundred times before, *now* is when it happens For the sake of dealing with these characters as living, growing human beings, we have sort of evolved this arbitrary seven-year thing, that it's been seven years Seven years is a nice, easy number to deal with

JIM: *A little more more than five, a little less than ten.* (Laughter.) *It's a good, sort of mystical number to deal with*

JOHN: Johnny was sixteen, and now he's about twenty-three, twenty-four Reed was according to Stan, in his late thirties, now he's forty... I guess that was even more blatant than the jet, the birthday cake with forty candles on it! So we can see little Reed crawling around on Massacre Mountain there with Sgt. Fury. *(Laughter.)* "Wow, this guy is

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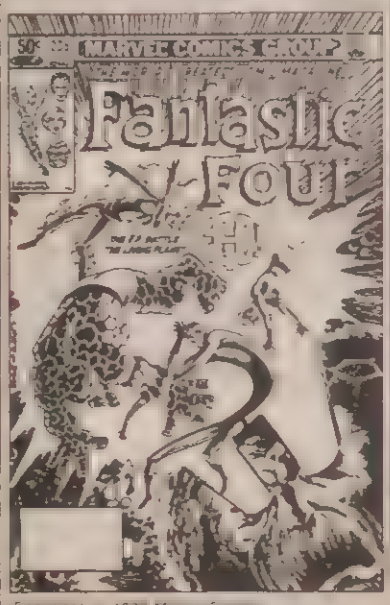
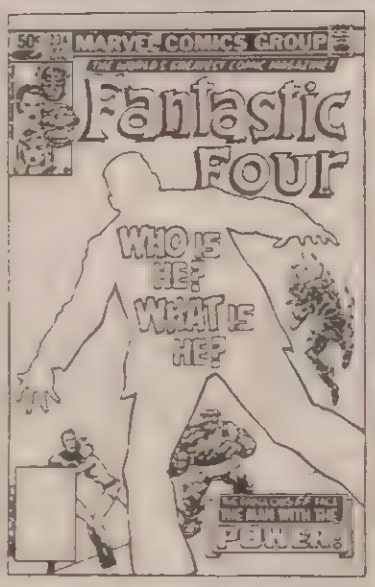
really smart, he's in the OSS and he's eighteen months old." *(Laughter.)* When you look at the Marvel of old, when it was Timely and all that, it used to go away every five years, and I'm firmly convinced that if Stan and Jack had known they were creating something that was going to be here twenty, twenty-five — hopefully thirty, forty years later — they would not have tied those characters into specific, historical events. They would *not* have said Reed had been in World War II. They would *not* have made Iron Man's origin tied to Viet Nam. I mean, that's okay 'cause there's always some kind of shit going on in Southeast Asia, but we reach a point when we have to start fudging around. I draw the line at having Ben a fighter pilot in Viet Nam, instead of in World War II, but he *has* become an ex-astronaut, instead of just an ex-fighter pilot. And the funniest one, really, for me, was when I was doing the recap of Dr Doom's origin, and I sat down and said, "Okay now, it's all seven years and all this kind of stuff, what can I do?" Physical changes occur in this university stuff. I wanted to make it subliminally 1964. Of course, if I am doing the FANTASTIC FOUR ten years from now, when I re-do that origin it will be subliminally 1974. But I dug out the reference on the university, State U., that was in the Dragon Man story, and that story came out in 1964. *(Laughter.)* So I just drew all the people to look as they had looked — you know, the clothes and all that — in that story. Here's Reed, he's in college twenty years ago, 1964. *(Laughter.)*

JIM: *You've created all these time warps...*

JOHN: It's not so much a time warp, it's just realizing that these are comic-book characters and they're fictitious, they *don't* really exist. *I* sure wouldn't want to read





about the Fantastic Four after they'd been around for twenty-five years ... and that's the choice. We've either gotta fiddle around with the time line, or we've gotta confront it head on and the Fantastic Four are going to be four different people about every ten years.

JIM: *In other words, what* you're *doing is just exactly what you said Stan Lee and Jack did, by having them tie in to certain historical events... you know, meaning The Beatles or being involved with World War II or —*

JOHN: Mine have never met The Beatles.

JIM: *Well, you can say "You're reading it now, that's happening now." That's your time-warp, I guess... but when you read it now, the references to seven years ago... that seven years ago is a definite point in time that you're tying it into...*

JOHN: *(Laughter.)* But it's a *constant* seven years is the point. It's a sliding scale, it's not a grid.

JIM: *It's sort of like Superman/Superboy...*

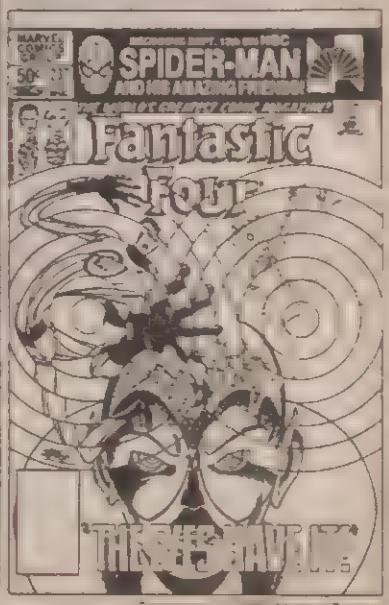
JOHN: Well, Superboy has now met **President Kennedy**, and any day now Superbaby will meet **President Kennedy**. *(Laughter.) That's* the thing we're trying to avoid. I don't *want* to do, say, a flashback where Reed meets **President Kennedy** or something when he was eighteen, because that ties him in to something. The other day **Gruenwald** and I were talking about Captain America. And I pointed out that in Marvel Time, **Ronald Reagan** has been President the *entire* time that Captain America has been out of the ice. *(Laughter.)* You know, he didn't come out of the ice in the early years of the **Kennedy** administration, he came out under **Reagan**. So it's a sliding scale, it's *always* seven years. If I do the FANTASTIC FOUR for another ten years, I might make it an *eight* year sliding scale. But there are so many elements of the book that make it impossible for this *not* to be the case — for example, Franklin, who is what, sixteen years old? *(Laughter.)*

JIM: *Yeah...*

JOHN: ...and he has *never* been drawn that way. And the funny thing is that none of the fans who come down on me so hard for *not* making Reed sixty and *not* making Johnny thirty-six and whatever, *none* of them are bothered by the fact that Franklin is five years old when he should, in fact, be sixteen. So, for me, it's just an ongoing thing. You know, when **Roger Stern** was still doing SPIDER-MAN we were talking about this, people saying, "Spider-Man... Peter Parker doesn't age because he was bitten by the radioactive spider, and he's *radiating* some kind of radiation *(laughter)* that prevents the people who are around him from aging, too; you know, people who are in constant association with him don't age." And I said, "Well, that would make him *really* easy to find, then, wouldn't it? Because any super-villain worthy of the name is going to look at this and see there's a pocket of people over here who *are not aging*. So having them age, or having them ignore their non-aging, creates even more problems than just this vague, seven-year Marvel Universe."

JIM: *I... I don't know, I like the "ignore age" policy. These solutions, rather than solving the problem, only seem to draw more attention.*

JOHN: It is, in fact, just a kind of quick nod to those fans who insist on having some kind of a logical time frame in there. Most of them are saying it's got to be twenty-five years, so we're reacting to that by saying, "No, Marvel Time is different from Earth Time."



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"Which Superman is real, which isn't?"

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This of course gets them working out all these graphs and grids and saying "Well, that means that one year of Marvel Time equals seven years of our time," and I say "Well, yes, up until *now*." *(Laughter.)* I was talking to **Weezie Simonson** about this not long ago, and she was saying she's going to be working on that frame for the Power Pack kids, so they're going to age one year in seven. And I said that's fine, but if that book runs for thirty or forty years, which any given comic book *can*, it has that potential — you're *still* going to run into a problem. Because you know, they're going to end up being teen-agers or young adults or whatever, and lose the whole point of the concept. So at some point you just have to look it and say yeah, we got our powers *this* amount of time ago.

JIM: *So we have to decide on which characters, in their own little universe, take place in what time?*

JOHN: Well, if you want to do that, we can go for Earth Two...

JIM: (Laughter.) *No, no!*

JOHN: ...and say that the early adventures of the Fantastic Four took place in another reality, right up 'til when they changed their costumes!

JIM: *When you're trying to do the kind of comic book, where any issue can appeal to a first-time reader, having multiple Earths and year complicated continuity is exactly the kind of thing you* don't *need.*

JOHN: Well, gosh... ah, I thought that the very first Earth Two story, "The Flash of Two Worlds," was really neat, and probably one of the best Flash stories ever done. And I think that it did not work from the second story on, largely because that first story — and I'm working wholly from memory here — did not include the rest of the Justice Society. It created the Flash — the Jay Garrick Flash is a unique individual — but the minute the rest of the Justice Society came in, it tripped. Because Wonder Woman, Batman and Superman — I guess those are the only ones — have never had a break in their run. And so you create that instant problem of which Superman is real, which Superman isn't? And if you talk about establishing a seven year or whatever bracket, as the "real" universe, DC has done that. In DETECTIVE 500, they established it as twenty-one years since Bruce Wayne's parents were killed. But what that effectively did was to say that the first Earth Two story *took place* on Earth Two, because "The Flash of Two Worlds" could not have happened on Earth One, with this time frame. And of course the instant that we saw those other characters, those characters from the Forties, they entered the weird time lock and haven't aged. So yes, they're old, but they're not as old as they should be.

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From FF #118: Alternate Earth Thing. "I ignore those guys as much as I can."

And so that whole concept of Earth Two or Earth Three or Earth X... it doesn't work, and it hasn't worked for years and years and years. That's why I will do *anything* to prevent that happening to the Marvel Universe. That's why it's better to just sort of lock our time and say now we're going to drag this seven-year chunk along with us — so okay, the Fantastic Four became the Fantastic Four now in, what, 1978. And it doesn't mean, as so many fans often say to me, it doesn't mean that all the stories before that were set in the *future*; and it doesn't mean, the most interesting twist on this one I've ever heard — one of the writers or editors for THE COMIC READER finally came around in a column and said "Okay, I now accept that the Marvel Universe is seven years old, but it sure doesn't seem to me as if these current stories are taking place in 1968." Well, *no*, that's *not* what it means! *(Laughter.)* You know, it means that this block of time follows us, wherever we go, and is slowly stretching out so that in another ten years it may be eight years, and in twenty years it may be nine years. But you have to do something like that because you've got *Franklin's* and Franklin's was five — and nobody objects when I say that. If I say that Sue is thirty in so many words, it always gets changed. I say that Franklin is five as I have several times, it never gets changed. It's become almost a game to me. How many "how old" references can I put in. *(Laughter.)* You know, and they won't take them out because they never do, but I'll have Sue say something well, in my first issue, I had her making a reference to being twenty-nine, and that got changed. I think that the hairdresser had said "This will make you look twenty years younger," and Sue's original line was something like "I'm sure my husband will enjoy being married to a hot-year-old." And that was changed to "...being married to a child." And in those days, I thought that was *subtle*. *(Laughter.)* But Franklin is five all over the place, and nobody seems to mind.

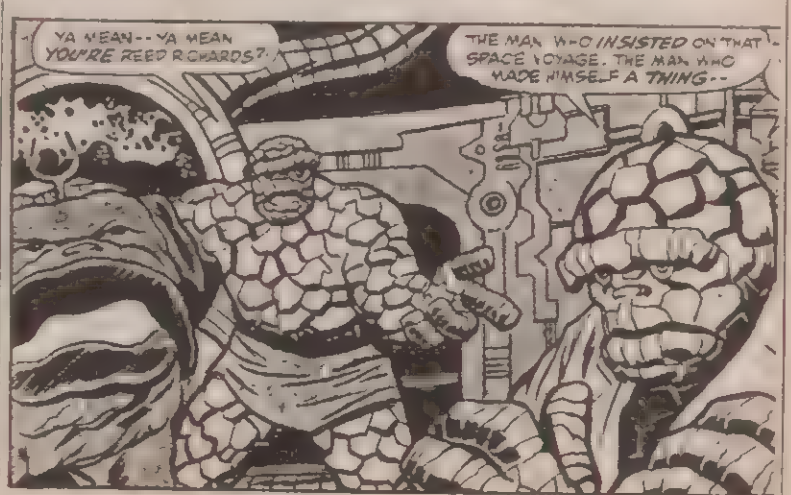
JIM: *Go figure it.* (Laughter.) *I think they even did some Earth Two type stories... there's a kind of Earth Two, Ben Grimm was a scientist somewhere.*

JOHN: Well, it was the alternate Earth Reed Richards who's The Thing.

JIM: *I think it was an Archie Goodwin alternate...*

JOHN: Yeah, that's the alternate Reed Richards, where *he* became the Thing, and Ben became this stretching, flaming guy and Sue became the Invisible Girl. And years later, they were grateful to Reed because he'd been able to *cure* them. *(Laughter.)* What cure? What do you need curing from — having this neat stuff?? I ignore those guys as much as I possibly can.

JIM: *Those things have only confused or drawn people's attention towards all these continuity problems. Whatever motivated me to try to edit out those kind of references?* (Laughter.) *I thought I was doing it for a good purpose, but —*



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"If I didn't write it, it isn't real."

JOHN: It doesn't trouble me, it troubles me when editors or writers put *in* references that make it twenty years, or make it... Roy Thomas did a story in THE INVADERS that had Dr. Doom in it — the young Doom with his face all bandaged — and I said, "Well fine, you know, this works from, say FANTASTIC FOUR #5 or FANTASTIC FOUR #25, but it *doesn't* work from FANTASTIC FOUR #195" or whatever it was up to then, because that would make this guy sixty years old, and he's *not*, he's *clearly* not. He's a contemporary of Reed Richards and Reed is not sixty.

JIM: *My answer would be not to worry about that sort of thing. What about the issue of the FF where you had Dr. Doom and his famous robots, and one of them was from the X-MEN story? Wasn't that your way of saying, for the sake of your stories, these other Dr. Dooms were not the Dr. Doom you knew and loved? I don't want to put words in your mouth .*

JOHN: I'll put the words in my mouth myself. If *I* didn't write it, it isn't really Doom. *(Laughter.)* I *have* to take that philosophy, you have to take that philosophy on *any* character that you're working with, because of the complexity of the Marvel Universe. What I'm really trying to do — with Doom, especially — is to make him bulletproof. So that *when* somebody does a stupid Dr. Doom story, it can be explained away. There have been *brilliant* Dr. Doom stories, and there have been *stupid* Dr. Doom stories. For example, I thought **Shooter** handled Dr. Doom well in SECRET WARS. But for every Doom who's handled well like that, you'll get the Doom who, uh, is a raving *maniac*.

First appearance of Doom robot (and last, for this one) in FF #5.

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And I can't accept that Doom, it seems like he turned a corner somewhere and turned into somebody else, at some point in the mid-1970s. And so, I've introduced all of these robots. All of them act and think like Dr. Doom, and we'll leave it up to the fans and say, *you* decide if this is a Dr. Doom who is the real Dr. Doom, or if this is a Dr. Doom who is a robot. I'm not going to come along and say this was a robot or this wasn't. I used the X-MEN in that instance, because everybody *except* Chris thought that that was wrong — that Doom would *not* have let Arcade strike a match on his shoulder under *any* condition. And in fact in the official Marvel Blue Book of Villains, that is listed as an appearance of a Dr. Doom robot. And I said o-*kay*, if it says it on paper, then it isn't *me* doing it, so I'll use that one to emphasize that, yes kids, every time that you see Dr. Doom, it *isn't* necessarily really him.

JIM: *Why must you constantly point out inconsistencies? Why can't you act like they never happened?*

JOHN: Well, they happened, but they happened in a different way. *(Laughter.)* And I'm quite sure that when I leave the FANTASTIC FOUR, somebody else is going to come along and put the lie to all my stuff *(Laughter)* because that's the way it seems to work. And the interesting thing is that the fans seem to *love* it. The hardcore fans seem

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"Doom used a robot in his first appearance."

to love following me through all this, and saying, "A-hah, here's an instance in which..."

So, you know, it's kinda fun in a way.

To use an analogy, if you had a character who is an immortal — this is one of my ongoing things that I play with in my head all the time — how do you do a character in a book who is an immortal? If he wakes up one morning and says, "I'm twenty-eight years old, I'm going to be twenty-eight forever," the only way to do it effectively is to have the morning that he woke up and said that be 300 years ago. 'Cause if it's *today*, then there's nothing you can do. You're just going to have this guy going along being immortal — but who cares? *(Laughter.)*

The same thing is true when you do something like introducing the Dr. Doom robots. You *have* to do it retroactively, otherwise there's no point to it. If you say from now *on* it's going to be robots. But what really gives it weight is to say, in fact, one of these stories back here was a robot. Stan and Jack really set that in motion, because Doom used a Doom robot in his first appearance, in issue #5. He did not actually physically confront the Fantastic Four in issue #5. What most people seem to have forgotten over the years, is that — even Stan forgot — Doom is not somebody who would go in and punch it out with The Thing. Doom is somebody who would *build something* that would go in and punch it out with The Thing. Or *brainwash* somebody to go and punch it out with The Thing. But he wouldn't do it *himself* unless he was really wacko — as he was, having stolen the Silver Surfer's power, and that puts him over the edge there, and he starts doing a lot of weird stuff... So any change you make in a character, if you can make it a retroactive change, it carries more weight.

JIM: *Getting back to the aging of the characters, you said if Stan and Jack could have anticipated that the book would have been around, they would have not tied them into a specific historic event. I was in a meeting with Shooter, and Stan and the other editors once, and Jim broached the subject to Stan, using as an example Nick Fury, Agent of Shield, a character who couldn't be more strongly tied into World War II. Stan really hadn't thought it out.*

What he had done really was, base a lot of the characters on whatever age he was, around the time he was creating them. And when they were broaching this subject, they weren't aware of what they were implying — that by saying that Nick Fury has now become this old geezer who shouldn't be able to survive a battle, they were saying "Stan, you're a real old guy now."

Even though they were talking about Nick Fury, Stan responded personally, "Well, I don't know, I — I could still fight. I could take a couple of guys..." (Laughter.) *I say you should pay no attention to that kind of continuity. Focus on the stories. Keep looking ahead and not spending too much time looking back. They even did a story where Nick took some sort of anti-aging potion — but what about all the other Howlers?*

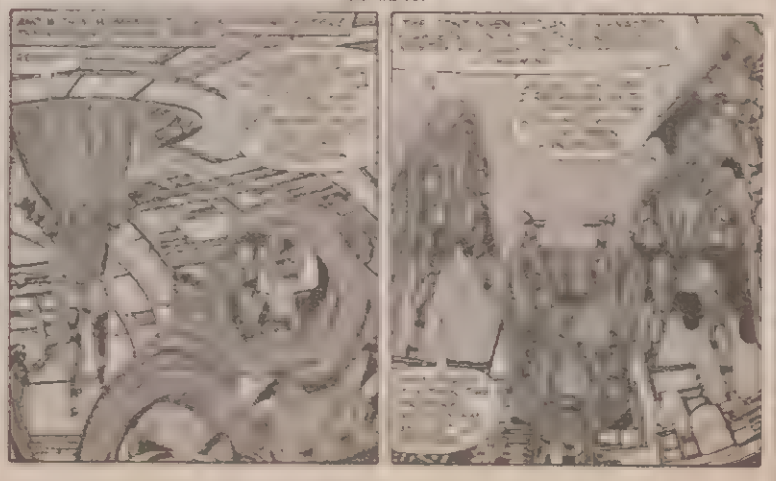
JOHN: Yeah, we've got a Dum-Dum Dugan who must be eight thousand years old *(Laughter.)* He was older than Fury, back in the war. I think what we can largely do these days, in the case of Sgt. Fury and his bunch, is to ignore the war. We've reached that point where we really have to say *forget* that he was ever in World War II, he's about forty years old. So forget the Infinity Formula, forget all this stuff — here he is, stuck now with the rest of us in this seven year bracket. Maybe he was in Viet Nam, I don't know... no he couldn't even have been in Viet Nam, 'cause that's ten years ago.

JIM: *They* did *stories where he was in Viet Nam!* (Laughter.) *It gets too weird. But, uh, back to the continuity of these things, in FF #237 you introduced Julie Angel...*

JOHN: Well, I knew that Frankie's time was finite, and I figured that the best thing to do would be to introduce the new girlfriend a

"Doom would not have let Arcade strike a match on his shoulder under *any* condition." Dr. Doom robot from X-MEN #146.

"Too Many Dooms!" More robots than even Victor Von has a right to have — from FF #246.



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"Everyone thinks I have a giant ego."

long time before Frankie went away, so it wouldn't be Frankie goes away and in the same panel a beautiful girl walks in and goes, "Hi, I see you're crying in your soup there..."

JIM: *Her first appearance was quite memorable. She was doing some sort of exercise. It was quite sexy.*

JOHN: That wasn't her first appearance, but thank you. I thought that was kind of fun. I liked it. But the weird thing was, with her first appearance, everybody instantly saw her as the new girlfriend, instantly *knew* that something was going to happen to Frankie, so I eventually figured I'd would throw in Sharon Selleck as a twist, to misdirect from Julie. And of course this whole Alicia thing evolved — she took everything miles away from the original course. Which is part of what I was saying earlier, about how I plot, that I like to leave the personal life stuff completely open, and literally throw stuff at myself

JIM: *Well, you don't* literally *throw stuff at yourself.* (Laughter.)

JOHN: In the sense that I literally put something in a panel without any thought at all as to how it's going to work out. Just go, well, real life doesn't give you any warning that you're going to get hit by a bus. So, let's have this character get hit by a bus! And then, try and work from it. And that, I think, gives it a greater sense of spontaneity and realism. And the Alicia thing really came about that way. I just one day said, "Jeez, I wonder what would happen if..." 'Cause I had been thinking about doing a story where Johnny had an affair with a married woman, and the whole point was going to be that he meets Franklin's kindergarten teacher up there in Connecticut — obviously all of this went away — and he falls in love with her, and they start to have this romantic relationship, and then he discovers that she's married. And he goes to confront the husband. And the husband is a paraplegic or an amputee — he's in a wheelchair, lost his legs in a car wreck And the husband says to Johnny, "Please, take her away from me. She deserves you more than she deserves me." And Johnny can't do it. And the woman ends up back with her husband. And then I sort of thought it through, and I've *got* a guy who's "in a wheelchair" in the book. I've got The Thing! What if Johnny has an affair with Alicia? And then, the instant that penny dropped, I said, "This isn't an affair, this is a whole new ballgame." And so this gave a whole new reason for Alicia to be in the book. Alicia's a neat character.

JIM: *Right*

JOHN: I like her a lot. And she had become — and has said herself so many times that I think the fans have finally picked up on it — she'd become Alicia-The-Thing's-Girlfriend. You know, with hyphens between it all. One word. This takes her out of that. This introduces her as a whole new independent, self-thinking, self-motivated character *without* turning her into somebody else, which has always been the tradition. "I don't like the Invisible Girl, I'll make her somebody else!"

JIM: *Right.*

JOHN: And it's expanded on who she is. And it all fits so perfectly into what I had been trying to do up until that point, with their relationship changing. You could say, "Oh, God, it's like he planned it!" Well, maybe I did, maybe somewhere deep down in my darkest unconscious I did, but it was one of those things that I just threw at myself. And the fans seem to love it.

JIM: *I like it — call me a fan. I'm very quirky, and there are certain books which have premises which I don't like by their very nature. One of them was WHAT IF? Once you have a book where anything can be done with the characters, it's like saying the characters in the regular book are obviously locked in. There are lots of stories that you can do — you've done it, for example the FF without their super powers. It's a good example, it proves to me that there are lots of stories that can be done very well as part of the regular book. The type of sequence you just outlined with Alicia was, I think, closer to the whole appeal of the early Marvel stuff, which was that the creators would say, "What if this happens..." and that's what would make it all interesting.*

JOHN: Well, I toss stuff back and forth just as much as I possibly can...

JIM: *Here's a question which I doubt you've been asked. Do you follow the night-time soaps at all — DALLAS or DYNASTY...?*

JOHN: No.

JIM: *Well, that's probably a good reason not to ask you the next question.* (Laughter.) *A lot of the stuff that you just mentioned, regarding the plotline with Johnny having an affair with the woman married to the paraplegic, is sort of similar to a major plotline in DALLAS, where Sue Ellen left J.R. — a different type of monster altogether — for this cowboy who winds up becoming crippled, and in the story tells her, "Leave me, I'm no longer..."*

JOHN: Oh, shit...

JIM: *"...the man you wanted."*

JOHN: Good thing I didn't do that story!

JIM: *No, no, I think there's enough differences not to worry...*

JOHN: Well, to me, the whole thing with the "reality" element of Marvel Comics has been a soap opera-like thing. And I don't look down on soap operas. I just have no real interest in them. It's much in the same way I

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"The way my head works, I go, 'You

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Above and below: A young and pretty Aunt Petunia from FF #239. Right: John and robot on cover of #238.

would love to do a Conan story, although I have never read CONAN with any real interest. I don't *like* those kinds of things. But I would like to *do* one; I would like to *do* a soap opera. But I don't *watch* them.

JIM: *Well, I think you'd do one very well. Dave Kraft recommended DALLAS to me, and I got hooked on it. They're locked into a different situation, where they don't have characters with super powers that can battle super-villains every issue. They are forced to keep moving the characters, putting them through all these different paces.*

JOHN: That's the way I approach it anyway; the super-villain of the month is the second consideration in any story. In fact, what I usually do, what I try to do on a regular basis, is evolve the story before I insert the villain. And I don't sit down and say I'm going to do a Dr. Doom story this month. I sit down and say I'm going to do this and this and this, and in that framework I'll use Dr. Doom. So it's less important — in terms of who the characters are — that they're fighting Dr. Doom, than *how* they're fighting Dr. Doom. What frame of mind they're in when they're fighting Dr. Doom.

JIM: *Well, that's all very important in maintaining the book. Not only making it interesting — but successful. What happened, when the book was stagnating, was the repetition of plots. They brought a character back, there was really very little in the way of twists, or making it different each time, except when Stan was doing it. There were real stories there, for quite a run, and when they brought a character back it was usually teamed up with some other character as part of some other plot, so you never got tired of seeing the character. The best way to make someone tired of seeing the same characters is to keep doing the same story. Speaking of bringing back characters, you "brought back," in issue #238, Aunt Petunia*

JOHN: Yes.

JIM: *What was the reaction to that?*

JOHN: Ummm... I think about 80% of the people liked it, because it actually managed to surprise most of the people. And it was relatively logical, I didn't have to ignore a whole lot of stuff. I think there were a couple of references to Aunt Petunia having white hair — well, maybe she's prematurely grey and she dyes her hair. *(Laughter.)* But it just seemed that this is the kind of a twist that I thought Stan and Jack would have done

JIM: *Yeah, I liked it*

JOHN: They would have said, "Okay we've been talking about this, his favorite aunt for forty years, you know — so here she is, she's a cute young sexpot and just happens to be his Uncle's *second* wife."

JIM: *I think Stan wrote his first fan letter to us with that issue.*

JOHN: It may have been

JIM: *Yeah, that was the one with the Doom cover that we stole from the STRANGE TALES issue.*

JOHN: Yeah, that was the first, she had one page in that issue. She actually appeared full-fledged in the next one

JIM: *I scribbled a note to myself to ask about the fans' reaction to your putting yourself on the cover of #238.* (Laughter)

JOHN: Everyone thinks I have a giant ego anyway... *(Laughter.)* I'm not altogether sure where I get that from. I'll defend my stuff loud and long if I have to, but then people come up and ask me the single most hated question at the conventions, "Who's your favorite artist other than yourself?" And I always begin my answer to that by giving that person a withering dirty look, and say, "You realize what an *insult* is implied there — that I begin with *me*, and judge everything from there?" Now I get, "Who's your favorite *writer* other than yourself?" *(Laughter.)* So of course it was naturally assumed that it was *my* idea to put me on the cover. And I was roasted. But, then, I wasn't going to blame you.

JIM: *Yeah well, it was my idea.* (Laughter.) *And I liked it. That cover was inked by Terry Austin. By the way, what do you think of working with Terry?*

JOHN: I think it's *great* working with Terry. It often trips me up *not* working with Terry, because even now that I've *not* worked with Terry longer than I've worked *with* him on a regular basis, I still do stuff with something in the back of my mind saying, "Terry will know what this is." And it's funny, too, because Terry called me the other day, I think on the latest episode of the Galactus series for EPIC, and he said it was funny because he hit something in it that he realized that four or five years ago he would have known what to do with but he'd forgotten. He called me up to find out what I meant by something. I remember that I used to give

don't like it, well, I'll make it *worse!*"

Terry a little scribble, and it would come out as what I intended it to be. I still do that occasionally and, depending on the inker, I will get either what I intended it to be — or a little scribble.

JIM: *Along those same lines, or related to that, the reaction I think, for the most part was very favorable to your doing those early issues. But the inking was very controversial.*

JOHN: Well, it wasn't very good.

JIM: *Oh, I don't know.*

JOHN: It was crude.

JIM: *If you look at the early issues of the FF, they were crude also. In this type of medium you have to give people time to evolve. The way this business works, either you're going to do a lot of inking in print, or you probably aren't ever going to be doing any inking. And I felt that you were doing so many things right, why would anyone even get upset if the inking isn't one hundred percent what they think it should be? We could have had Joe Sinnott, but there was an economic problem with that — he only works from breakdowns. He's more valuable as a finisher. So we couldn't have gotten the look of the book that you wanted to get across if you only did breakdowns. You can explain it better...*

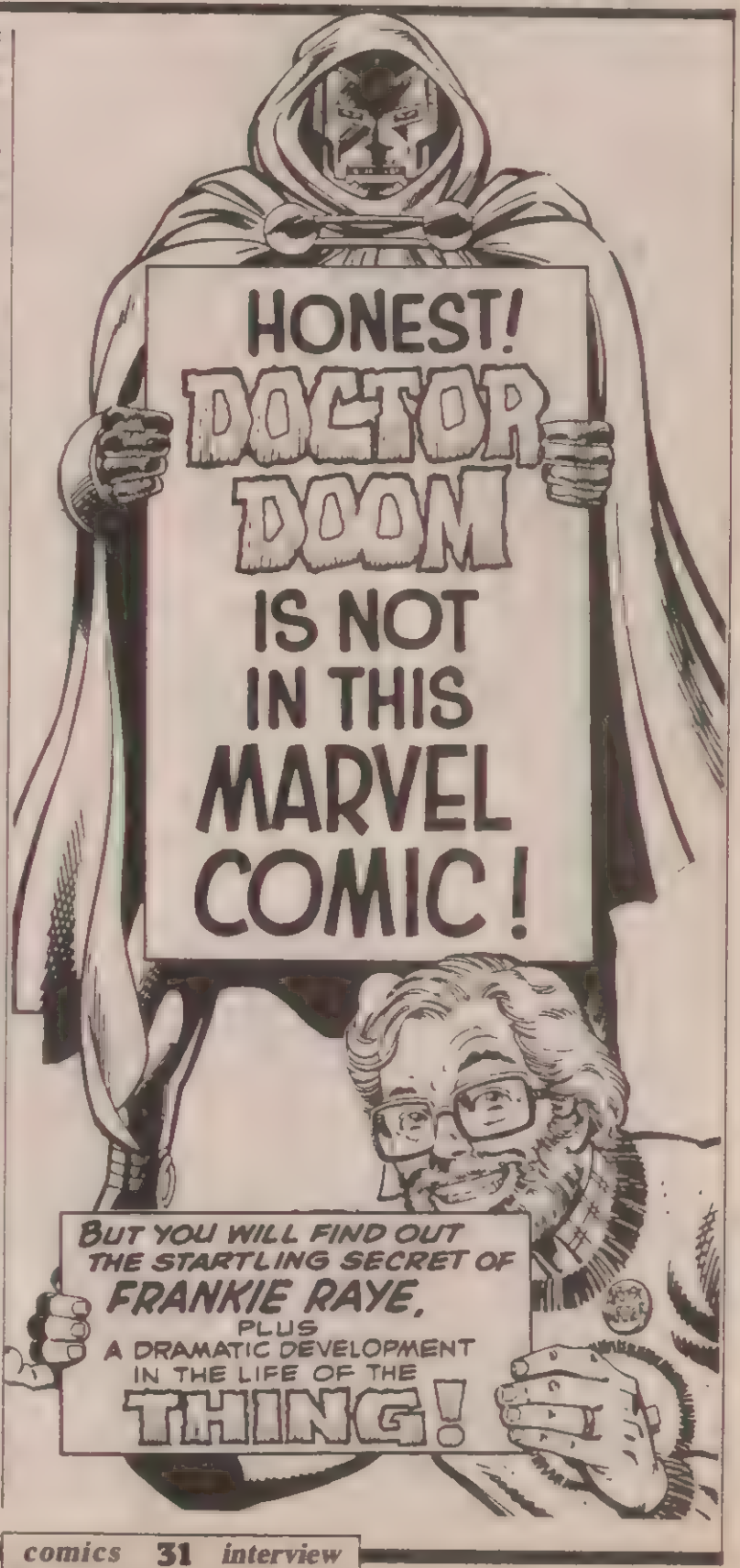
JOHN: Well, as I understood it, Joe wanted off the book, anyway. So I thought okay, he wants off the book anyway, here's the chance to really make a break. I said okay, let's go with something, and I *did* grow as an inker. I certainly developed as an inker. In the last year or so that I was inking, I was trying to get back to the real simple vigor of the early books, which was very sparse, very rough inking, but that had an *enormous* amount of enthusiasm and life and energy to it. And the fan mentality that has grown up on the **Neal Adams** and earlier **John Byrne** couldn't accept that. So it suffered a lot, and with the way my head works when I get a lot of negative stuff, I go, "You don't like it, well, I'll make it *worse*!" *(Laughter.)* And so I'm not especially proud of my last year, up to, say, when I started letting other people ink it again. But *before* that, I think I really hit my peak on "my" Galactus trilogy, when Frankie took off and left and all that. I forget the number, the issue that opens with Julie exercising on the splash page.

JIM: *That's the very issue I marked in my notes, inking — great.*

JOHN: That's the one I like the best.

JIM: *Your [illegible] that I think [illegible] it. Rapidograph.*

JOHN: Yes. I was using Rapidographs up through those issues and then I started using some Japanese pens that **Carl Potts** had shown me. They were the greatest thing that



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"People hold up my old X-MEN and say, 'This is

"I think I really hit my peak on 'my' Galactus trilogy, when Frankie took off and all that."

ever happened to the art world, so of course they "improved" them *(laughter)* and I couldn't work with the new, improved ones — but it took me three or four issues to discover that, and I also discovered I couldn't go back to the Rapidograph, 'cause I'd lost that, so I experimented with a lot of other things. Finally, on this last batch of inking I was doing, I ended up using the old dried out pens, trying to get them to work, because *(laughter)* they had worked so well the first time. And then I just sort of gave it up altogether, and said, "Okay, let's find some inkers here, so I can do more books." I wanted to pencil more

JIM: *Well, I'll be alone, but I'll miss your inking. I found it very interesting, mostly the attention to detail. I think in the very beginning you were probably doing tight pencils, and then you put on your inking hat and inked. Then I think you later started going to breakdowns . . .*

JOHN: I went to breakdowns at one point, which meant I was sending the stuff in to be lettered, and was still getting it back to ink — and then I kind of realized that I was doing the same job twice, and there was no reason to do that, because I had reached a level of control over the ink. When I pencil, I very rarely change the first line I put down . . . so I said, "Why don't I make that first line in ink, and skip a step here?" The problem that that generated was, Marvel has a standing rule now that we like to avoid paste-up lettering, so I would put in the balloons — which caused some problems — then I started, almost unconsciously when I look back at that, leaving out backgrounds so that the balloons would be floating in mid-air. Now this is the first thing that the fans picked up on, the **John Byrne** crowded backgrounds were disappearing. They were *not* realizing that the figures and the faces and all of this were becoming so much more realistic, and so much better. Sue wasn't balloon-headed anymore, these people were having real expressions and really doing stuff. *That*, they were not noticing. All they were noticing was that the backgrounds were disappearing. And eventually I noticed that myself — that you could go through some of the later issues, and realize that for page after page there just aren't any backgrounds. The horizon line and that's *it*. And that was because I didn't want to put anything up there that the letterer would have to work around. And so I finally realized that the best solution to it really — in terms of getting the stuff done, not having to do the job twice, which diminishes the interest and therefore the spontaneity — was to go back to penciling. And the interesting thing was that not having penciled for four years, but having developed this incredible degree of confidence that I didn't have back

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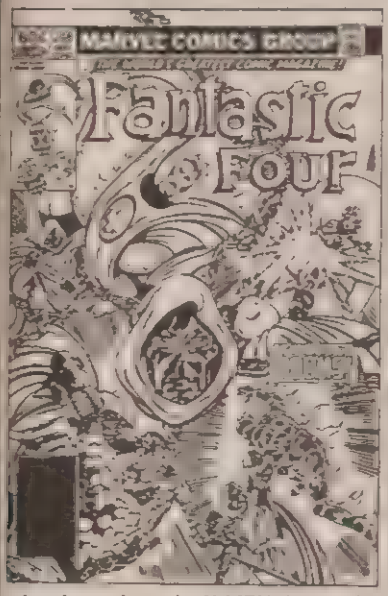
great, why don't you work this way anymore?"'



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when I was doing the X-MEN, having developed this confidence over the four years that I was inking, my penciling has improved 1000%. I mean, every line is exactly the line I want, and I don't have to erase every other panel anymore. People hold up my old X-MEN stuff to me and say, "This is great, why don't you work like this anymore?" and I can only say, "Because I'm *better* than that now."

JIM: *Also that stuff is a collaboration with Terry...*

JOHN: But it's also very *stiff*, everybody has the same build, everybody has three stock poses that they hit from panel to panel. Of course, I was dealing with eight characters, you know, so there wasn't room to play around with things, I had to get it done. I was only turning out, what was it, a page and a half in the morning, and a page and a half in the afternoon — so three pages a day. That was a probably shorter day than I'm working now, but it was *labor*, because I wasn't comfortable with my style. It wasn't because I was putting more into it, by any stretch of the imagination — it was taking longer to do a page — a panel would take me longer because I couldn't get it to flow. Now — *bang!* — there it is, it comes out.

JIM: *Given the choice of watching a book remain the same or constantly change, I choose the book which is constantly evolving, trying different things. Even if it doesn't always work, it's more interesting to me than playing it safe. In other words, if you just were locked into that X-MEN style and Terry kept inking all these issues, that to me would not have been as interesting. You know, it becomes like what you were saying about the characters' — as soon as something's predictable, it loses something.*

Like, the first few issues when you inked Johnny, you were inking his flame effect with the Rapidograph — then you started using your Rapidograph to draw brush lines, or did you use a brush, I don't know...

JOHN: Um, it may have been both, actually, it would kind of depend on the size of the figure.

JIM: *Even The Thing, literally changing his shape in each issue. The costumes, the backgrounds. Lots of things were going on. These things in and of themselves are not the most interesting things in the world, but they're little details that I think add a texture and a richness to the book that makes the whole that much better. A simple example is, when you first showed the Baxter Building at night. Your playing with what the city looked like at night was very interesting. At one point you had the Baxter Building surrounded by taller buildings and I asked you about that, and you gave me your usual great explanation.* (Laughter.) *You know, I was willing to buy it... and then I think it was the tallest building on the block again.*

JOHN: Well, now it's a hole in the ground. But, uh, it was still surrounded by buildings taller than itself. I moved those buildings back again. *(Laughter.)* But you know, it's thirty-five stories; that's one of the inescapable time-locks of the Baxter Building. That's why I blew it up. Take a look out the window over here and you'll notice that most of what you can see is more than thirty-five stories. So...

JIM: *You had one shot where what's-his-name picked the whole building up, and the date on the cornerstone was 1961.*

JOHN: Well, that's when it was built. *(Laughter.)*

JIM: *I'll just go on record as being a fan of your inking.*

JOHN: Well, I don't know... I'm a fan of my *middle period* of inking. I really liked that. And it seemed to me the easiest, too. The later stuff was harder to do, because I was deliberately, consciously leaving stuff out. **Frank Miller** calls it de-rendering, that kind of locked into my head, like, "Hey, it has a name! What I'm doing here has a *name*. Great!" *(Laughter.)* That's the same thing Frank tried to do in RONIN, but he took it a whole different direction. He was dealing with it more in the terms of a line quality, and I was dealing with it more in terms of what's the least amount of stuff you can put in a picture in order to tell the story. Which is what **Jack Kirby** was doing twenty years ago. He was doing it because he was doing forty books a month.

JIM: *Well, no one's a greater believer in simplicity than I am. But, you know, I think I like both. When you did the all-white cover of ALPHA FLIGHT — the issue with all the white panels — I enjoyed that; to me, it was exciting and fresh. Whereas these sort of like fan-consumers feel they want a specific quality... I guess they like your art a certain way, inked in a certain style. They just want to keep buying that...*

JOHN: I was at a convention, I think it was in Philadelphia, and I was doing my question and-answer session, and one guy asked when were we going to move the "World's Greatest Comic Magazine" line to the X-MEN, because *that* was the world's greatest comics magazine *now*. And I said, "Well *why* is it the world's greatest, why is it better than the FANTASTIC FOUR?" And he said, "Because it has more blacks in it." And he was Black, so it threw me for a moment. Like, how can I phrase this and not sound like a racist, "You mean, more Negroes?"

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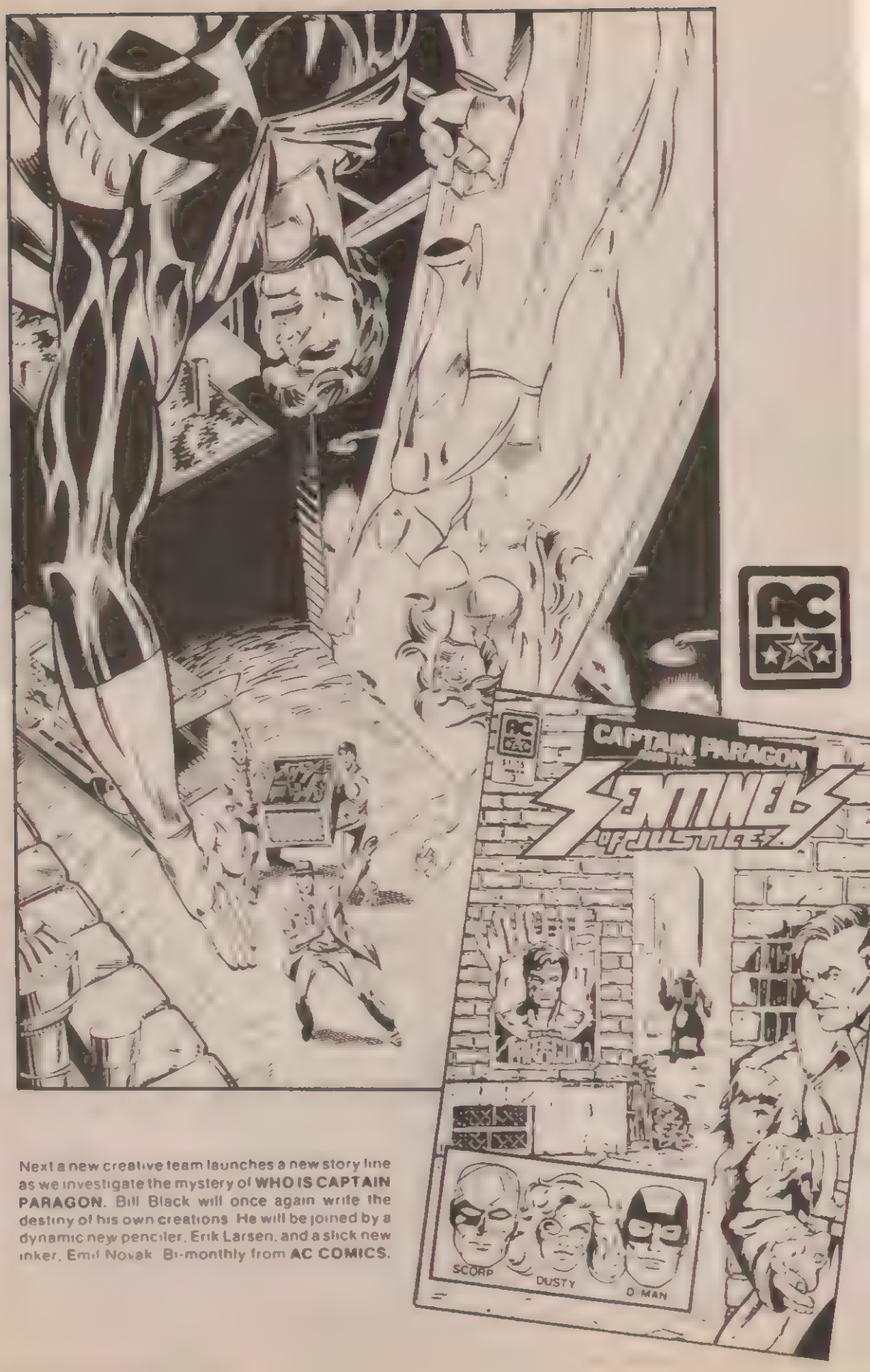

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"They're conditioned to like the X-MEN."

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And he said "No more black. More ink." And I said, "Well, what do you do? Do you weigh these things?" *(Laughter.)* "Do you buy it by the pound?" And he couldn't give me a straight answer; all he knew was that, somehow, he *liked* the X-MEN better because he felt that it had more blacks in it. And the funny thing was that it was when **Paul Smith** was doing it. Paul, who did animation-style art! We always used to kid him, kid Paul that it was okay to put blacks in it because it didn't have to *move (Laughter.)* And Paul was the first to agree that his stuff was open and was *just* color. This guy, in searching for whatever it was that he liked better about the X-MEN... well, of course, the fact that they are conditioned to like the X-MEN, you know, helps a great deal.

JIM: *It's a case of the fans being too literal. The early Marvel style was having a sense of humor about everything. No one blinks when a circus calls itself "The Greatest Show on Earth." It's part of the showmanship to call itself that. Just because DC has a book called WORLD'S FINEST comics, and we have...*

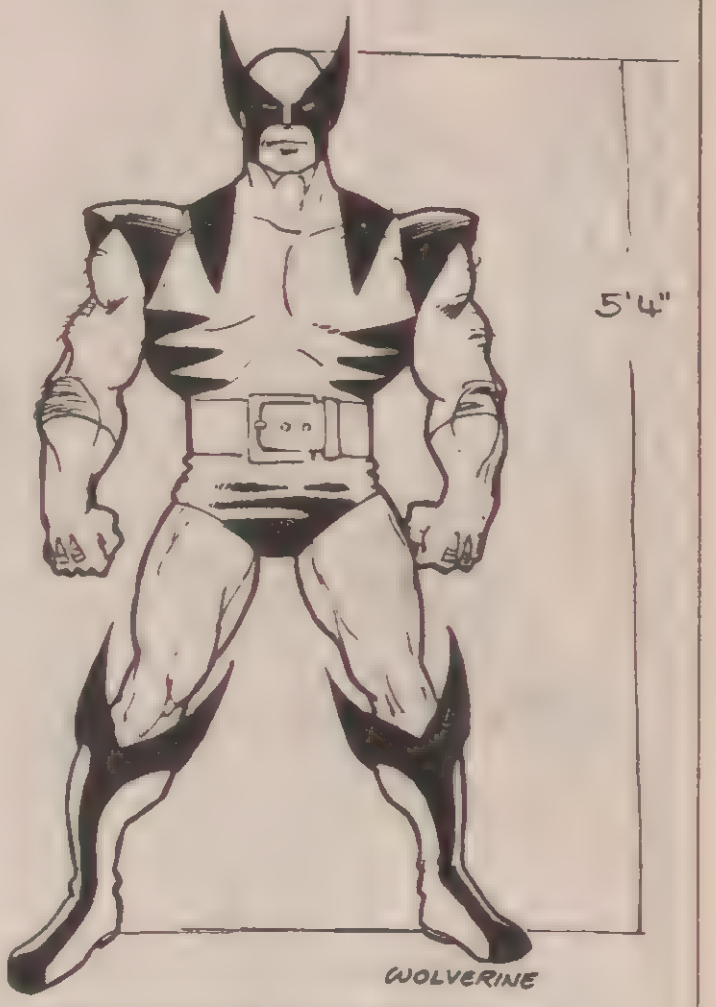
JIM & JOHN *(in unison):* The World's Greatest Comic Magazine...

JIM: *Getting back to when you were talking about how you were structuring stories — just when the fans would write in and say, "Oh, this is what you're going to do," you would then change it?*

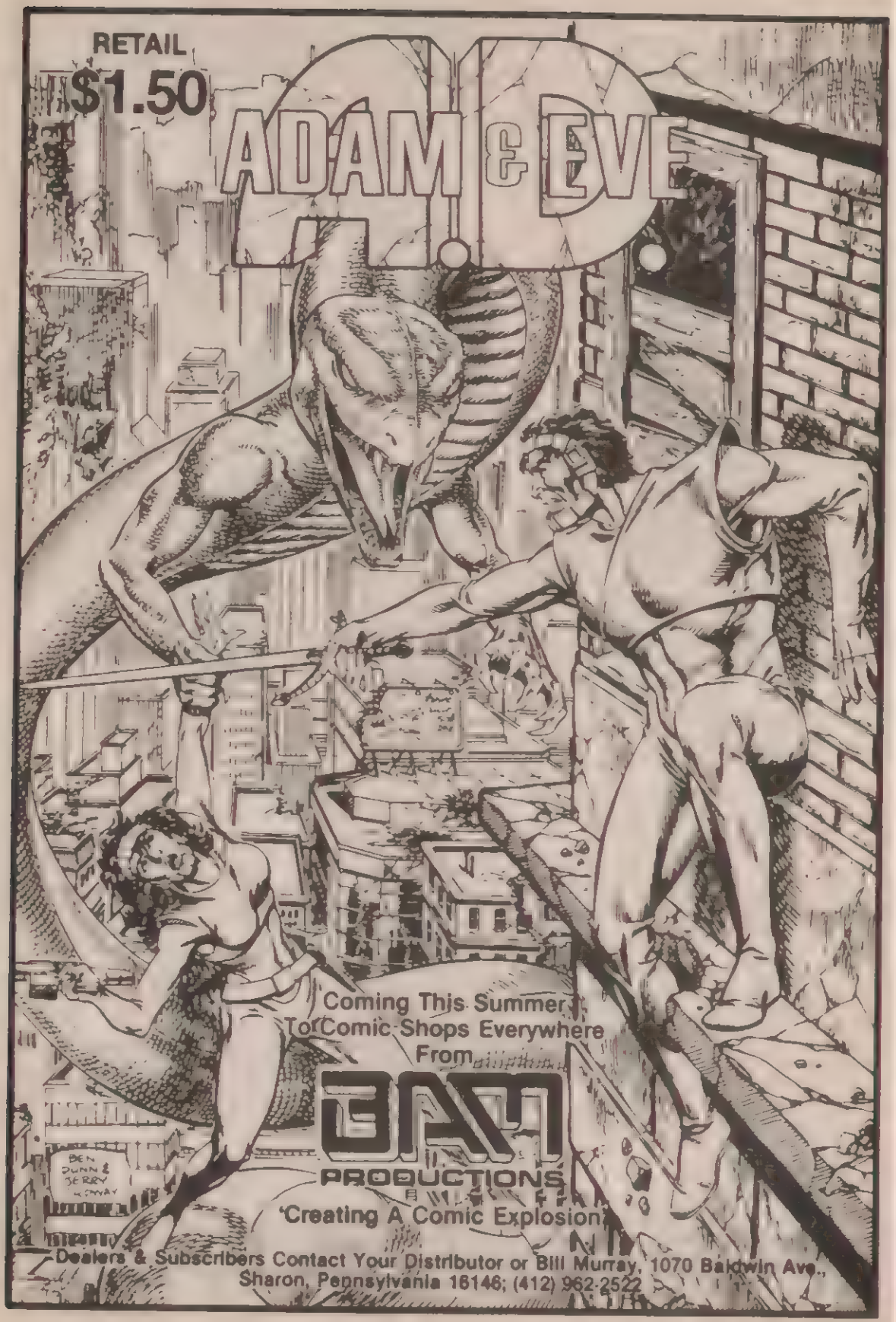
JOHN: If they figured out what I wanted to do, I would always change it. That was one of the reasons I used to like to go to conventions; I don't do it anymore. But going to conventions gave me a good idea of what the fans *thought* was coming, and if they were too close to what was actually coming, then I would change what was coming. Which is... a game; it gets harder and harder to play because there *are* a finite number of stories. But, you know, you don't want to give 'em *exactly* what they want; you want to give them eighty-five percent of what they want. But you want at least ten percent of 'em to be really *pissed off*! "I *hate* this! Why did you *do* this?" There's a cartoon I remember seeing years ago — **Prince Philip** had said that he didn't like what was happening in the DAILY EXPRESS. So **Giles**, the editorial cartoonist for the paper, did a cartoon of **Lord Beaverbrook**, who owned the DAILY EXPRESS, being marched off to the chopping block. *Laughter.* The caption was "The EXPRESS is a bloody awful newspaper," says the Prince. "Oh, well," says Lord B., as they march him off to the tower. "At least he *takes* it, or he wouldn't know it was a bloody awful newspaper." So there *is* an element of that... even if they *hate* it, I'd like some of the fans to hate it because it means they're getting turned on or aggravated and reacting to it, other than just this knee-jerk Stick-It-In-A-Plastic-Bag-And-Hide-It-In-A-Closet thing which I hate. I got a letter the other day, in point of fact, from a kid who *thought* he was going to impress me as being the kind of fan I really want, because he said he doesn't just *read* these things and stack them in the corner, he appreciates their *value* and he puts them in plastic bags and saves them. *(Laughter.)* And I read this and thought, "You're *exactly* the kind of person I'm *not* trying to reach." I want the kids who *do* read these things until they fall apart, and then throw them away if necessary. I want it to be... I'm writing for the kids who, the kid that *I* was, who takes out the comic and reads it five hundred times before the next issue comes out. Who'll read it five hundred times even *after* the next issue comes out.

JIM: *I think the one battle I'll never be able to win in MARVEL AGE is against the fan press critics. They are so anti-SECRET WARS. I mean, like, the book was the most successful comic Marvel's done in years. Someone must have liked it. I've seen all the incredibly favorable mail coming in. I don't think it's my job, or MARVEL AGE's, to respond to the thousands of people who liked it and point out the weaknesses that they should have been looking for. I think it was a great book for many, many other reasons than just the actual stories themselves. It was, in one way, a response to all that mail, kids saying, "Do a story..."*

JOHN: I would have *died* for SECRET WARS when I was eight, nine, ten, twelve years old. I mean, that's, that's *primal* comic book. That's what you *wanted* every month was every bad guy in the world fighting every good guy in the world. That was the success of the JUSTICE LEAGUE. That was what *inspired* the FANTASTIC FOUR in the first place. I think **Shooter** took on an almost



Original character study from John Byrne's sketchbook.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"They're crazy for *SECRET WARS*. It's logical."

impossible task; I think he did it quite well, but he was trying... no, he wasn't even trying, but there would be those who would *interpret* it as trying to please everybody — and you can't. Because he wrote the X-Men as he perceived them, and the FF as he perceived them, and The Avengers as he perceived them. And not in just carbon copies of the **Claremont/Byrne/Stern** corner of the universe. So naturally, your X-MEN fans are going to throw up all over it, and your FANTASTIC FOUR fans are going to throw up all over it... excuse me, let me correct that: your **Claremont** fans and your **Byrne** fans are going to throw up all over it. *(Laughter.)* The people who love the *characters* are going to say, "This is the characters, they're not acting out of character," because they don't buy the X-MEN for some particular little quirk of Chris's, or buy the FF for some particular little quirk of mine. The majority buy them for the characters. Because they *like* these four guys in the FANTASTIC FOUR. So they're going to go *crazy* for a book like SECRET WARS. It's logical.

JIM: *As Stan pointed out, the type of criticism he enjoyed getting was when they cared about the characters. When they're talking about the characters, I think that means somewhere, on some level, you've been successful just getting them to care about the characters. As opposed to someone writing in saying, "Gee, the inking was real good." That's a whole separate thing, and, I don't think there's anything wrong with that, either. But, you know, how big an audience can you build up for a title based on fine quality inking?*

JOHN: When I used to read comics as a kid, I didn't buy it for the art or for the writing, I bought it for the characters. I mean, with a book like SUPERMAN you didn't have any choice, you got three stories by three different artists and three different writers. I can remember *not* buying an issue of the FANTASTIC FOUR because I didn't like the way the Invisible Girl looked on the cover — and that was the closest I ever got to, like, an artistic judgement of the book. And that was really because I *liked* the Invisible Girl, and didn't like the way she looked. Not because I didn't like the drawing, per se, but I didn't think it did her justice.

JIM: *Whenever Lady Di appears in public with a different hairstyle, a different outfit, there are people who completely are into that! You're able to get that type of excitement into the comics. Like, the first issue you did, you gave Sue a new hairstyle, and Reed has been balding ever since. On one hand, it may sound real shallow — that one of the things this book has to offer is new hairstyles on a character — but it's not that, it's getting them to* care *about the characters, almost to believe in them, really.*

JOHN: That's very important. I remember being a kid, being eleven or twelve years old when I first started reading the FANTASTIC FOUR, and I lived in a little tiny town in Canada, and SUPERMAN took place in Metropolis, BATMAN took place in Gotham, but the FANTASTIC FOUR took place in New York. And *that* was a city I knew, and it was real and it was that momentary thought of — have I been missing something? Are these... is this *real*, somehow? *(Laughter.)* And that was a very important decision I think that Stan made, which was to put it in the real world

JIM: *Yeah, that's why I was upset when you and Sterno remembered that the first issue took place in Central City someplace...*

JOHN: Well, we put Central City in California and that establishes an important part of Reed's history. Obviously, Reed is a Californian... maybe a California Republican these days. *(Laughter.)* It establishes something important. It's an automatic growth that's built into these characters, they started out in a fictional setting and turned into a real one. And BATMAN started out in New York and moved to Gotham!

JIM: *Well, I'm very inconsistent on this point*

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"I played Frankie the way we all would be."

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myself. On one hand, I would have liked to have forgotten Central City; on the other hand, I don't blink at Franklin being five years old.

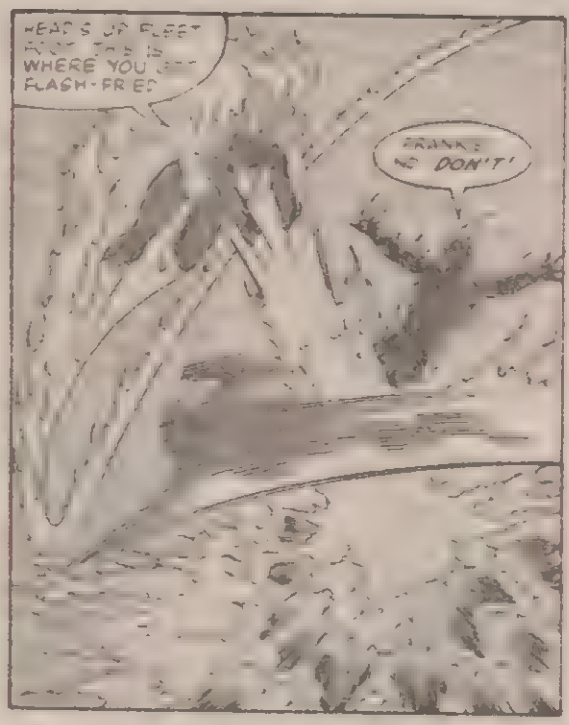
JOHN: Well, it's like Latveria—how big a map of Europe would you need before you could find it? It's five miles on a side. But the neat thing about Central City, having been established as real, is that it gives you a point in space and time to refer to. I have a thing I want to do for the twenty-fifth anniversary issue where they go back to Central City and go back to the spaceport, and it's all cracked and broken and grown over with weeds, the way Cape Canaveral is. I remember seeing a thing with **Ray Bradbury** on TV, where he's walking around Pad 19, I think it was, or where Apollo 11 was launched from. The concrete's cracked and there's weeds growing up through it. This should be an *historic monument*, but it isn't. And neither is the Richards' Rocket Group. Nobody's been back there for... seven years? *(Laughter.)* And it's all cracked and broken and it's... a nice sort of point to refer to. This is where we came from. This is where we began.

JIM: *Back to a chronological review of the FF issues...in #240 Frankie Raye began, I noticed, slipping in again. In some ways I think you were almost doing a bit of a Wolverine riff — she was very trigger-happy...*

JOHN: It's not so much Wolverine as more *my* interpretation of how a realistic super-hero would be. You get these powers, you're going to get hard-assed about it. With great power comes great responsibility, but absolute power corrupts absolutely. I just wanted to play Frankie that way because I knew I was going to get rid of her. I wanted to play her as a little more of the way I think we *all* know we would be if we could do this stuff.

JIM: *It was also, I guess, a throwback to how The Thing originally was... or The Hulk.*

JOHN: Which we're going to be getting back to in both cases, you know, more and more.



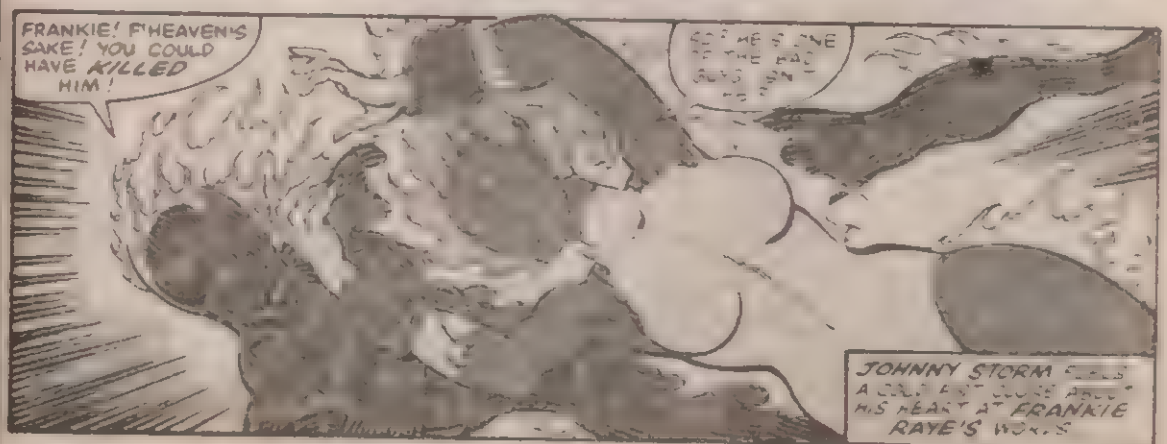
Frankie Raye does a Wolverine riff? From FANTASTIC FOUR #240.

JIM: *I skipped over #239. That was the* first *child abuse comic I was involved with, courtesy of you. How did that come about?*

JOHN: How *did* that come about? I wanted to do something that was weird and mystical, that was out of the established milieu of the Fantastic Four, just to show that there *is* no established milieu for the Fantastic Four, and the child abuse thing evolved almost second hand. It was one of those things where I realized, hey, here's a child abuse story, let's do a child abuse story. And of course it was *instantly* ignored by everyone. *(Laughter.)* I get all these letters saying, "Oh, did you see this Child Abuse Story in the X-MEN?" Well, how about *mine* that came out two years earlier?

JIM: *Or the special child abuse book we just did — when you label it, then they notice.*

JOHN: Well, that's the thing — if you put it on the cover, everybody knows about it. I remember when Chris and I were doing the IRON FIST book, and **Len Wein** was writing all our cover copy 'cause he was the editor at the time, and we had been very carefully setting up this romance between Danny and Misty Knight, so that everybody would *not* be surprised when we finally burst on the scene with this interracial romance. And Len put cover copy on the issue where he was



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"Never believe what you read on a cover."

fighting Colleen Wing, "Iron Fist vs The Woman He Loves." And we couldn't get away from that. All the mail after that was like, "Why isn't he with Colleen? What's he doing with Misty?" We'd been setting up Misty for a *year*, and they lost it because it didn't say that on the cover. And I go around, used to go around to conventions saying, "Never believe what you read on the cover." *(Laughter.)* Never believe the cover, believe *half* of what you read in the letter column believe the next issue blurb, maybe. But we had this weird thing that we have to overcome with the fans, if you *dare* put something on the cover, you're locked into it

JIM: *On the FFs I edited, sometimes* you suggested the cover copy. I more or less kept whatever suggestion. There was a really bad [illegible] cover, on an ALPHA FLIGHT cover, and I thought, I don't want to do it, but [illegible] cover back to the first FF issue. The cover

JOHN: Diablo

JIM: *There's some ALPHA FLIGHT character on the cover battling Diablo. I read that, finished it, and felt something odd about it. I said, "Gee, Diablo's [illegible] in this flashback... " What the heck happened here?*

JOHN: Well, what the heck happened was that they changed my cover copy. Because I suggested *that* cover, and I suggested the cover copy be a big banner saying, "Warning — This Scene Does Not Appear Anywhere In This Magazine

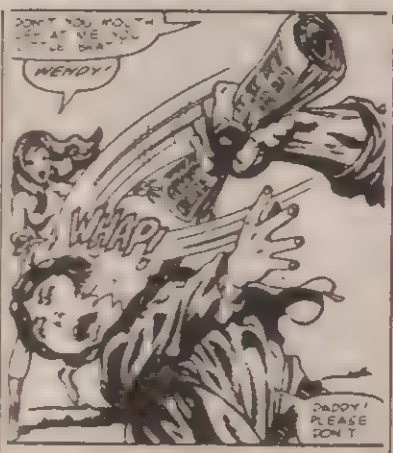
JIM: *Well that sounds familiar.* (Laughter.)

JOHN: And then they changed it to "Bet on Diablo — He's Been Doing It For Centuries." It came out and I went, "Oh, I suppose there was some reason for this

JIM: *Not to pat myself on the back, but I felt an obligation to be representative and truthful on the covers. With you it's fun to be misleading in a clever way*

JOHN: The whole point of that cover was to be a twist on the Surgeon General's warning on cigarette packets. It might even have said, if we'd have worked it out in detail, "The Surgeon General has determined that Diablo does not appear in this magazine," or whatever. But that is what I *wanted* that cover to be, and that's *not* what it came out like

JIM: *Well, even that FF cover with you and Doom was a combination of the old STRANGE TALES cover, where down in the corner Jack put Dr. Doom's head, and Stan just wrote copy to go along with it, knowing that Dr. Doom wasn't in it, and making a gag out of it. And at about the time you were doing the FF, Dr. Doom was appearing, it seemed, everywhere. Because there was a policy way back when, that only the people on the FF were able to use him, and then when that policy no longer applied*



JOHN: Well, that was during the writer editor days, all the writer editors seemed to have tied up their major characters. You know you would say, "Can I use Fred the Unconquerable?" and they'd say, "Well, no. I have Fred the Unconquerable in a story *six years* from now. *(Laughter.)* And I'm leading up to it." And when the writer editors went away, when Shooter said, "All the characters are available," everyone went nuts

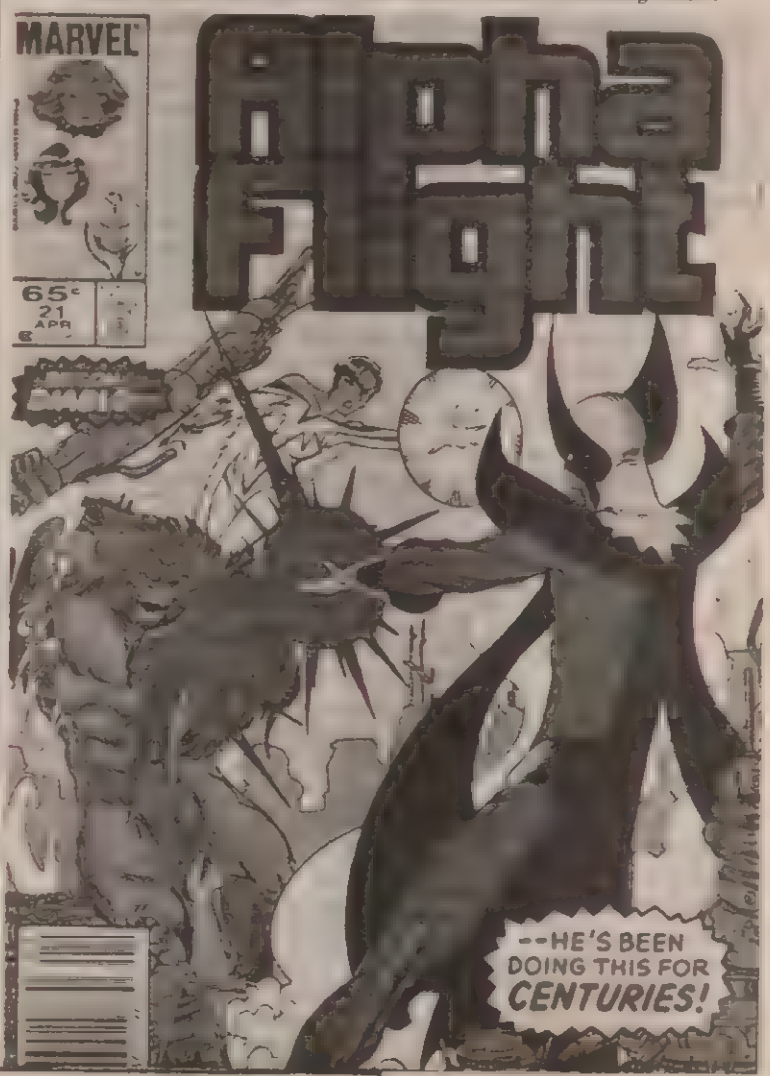
JIM: *Like the dam burst*

JOHN: And the one they all seized on was Dr. Doom

JIM: *So at the same time, I think NEW TIMES had a Farrah Fawcett cover and it just said, "Absolutely nothing in this issue about Farrah Fawcett." So it was a combination of Dr. Doom appearing everywhere and wanting to do a cover harking back to the Stan-and-Jack type stuff. Overall, I thought that a lot of the FF covers came out very nicely.*

JOHN: Well, I haven't cut and cut and cut yet on an FF cover. I've been tempted a couple

Above: Child abuse from FF #239. Below: Beware misleading covers.



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"Fans don't *really* know what they want."

of times. Some of the symbolic covers come close.

JIM: *If anything, I think we held back a lot. Even in the first Torch solo story we could have had Hammerhead on the cover, but I felt that if the writer and artist want to have a surprise ending, or something was important to the story... then don't have that on the cover!*

JOHN: That's one of the things that **Roger Stern** always jokes about. The DC syndrome of, "Hey, kids, who's the mysterious villain in this issue of THE FLASH?" It's *probably* the guy hitting the Flash with a baseball bat on the cover. *(Laughter.)*

JIM: *Okay. Back to #239 again. Jim Shooter came up to me after that had been published, and he was going to conventions, and this is where the myth began that I "just let you do whatever the hell you wanted to," I [illegible]*

JOHN: That's why I refer to you as Well-Trained.

JIM: *Yeah. A lot of fans either just didn't get the ending of that story, or they were confused — it wasn't spoon-fed or something — and they were complaining, "What's John Byrne doing writing? He doesn't even know how to end stories!" Why do you think people were confused?*

JOHN: Because they don't want what they say they want. There've been two instances where I have been tripped up by trying to give the fans what the *letters* say they want. And the letters always say, "We are so bored and tired of seeing endless fights." You know, "Give us something else." So in the "Wendy's Friends" story, and in the next issue I guess, the Inhumans —

JIM: *The death of Maximus, done in flashback...*

JOHN: —I said, okay, we will have a major fight that we don't have to see for this one, and then in the next one, instead of having the heroes arrive and save the day, they arrive and the day's *already* been saved. They don't arrive *too late* — it's already taken care of. And the fans *hated* it. Of *course* they hated it. They don't know, they don't *really* know what they want. Which makes it really hard to *give* them what they want. So I stopped trying to give them what they want, and started seriously giving them what *I* want from that point on. But I think "Wendy's Friends" had an ending...

JIM: *I do too. I think I would have mentioned it to you if I'd thought it didn't.* (Laughter.)

JOHN: The Inhumans story didn't have a *muddle*, that was very deliberate. But it had an ending. I think the problem is that there've been too many years of writers — not to name names or even specific titles — but there are too many years of writers who hit the kids over the head with it. So the ending of the book has to be the hero making a speech, or standing in the midst of devastation, "Lo, my beloved country..." Otherwise they can't recognize that that's the end of the story. And a lot of the complaint about my early stuff was, "Well, hey, the story just *ended*." Well, *yeah*. Stories just *do*. Real life, you know, when a person gets hit by a bus, it kind of *ends* there, you know. We don't do an issue on the *ramifications* of it. *(Laughter.)* When Chris and I were doing the X-MEN together, and IRON FIST before that, we kind of fell into a bad habit of a story beginning, then another issue that really had nothing to do with that, and then the end of that story. So the kids kind of got used to the **John Byrne** thing as being three issues to tell what is a *two issue* story. Well, when I pull it all down to one issue, which I'm going to be doing on THE INCREDIBLE HULK, they just get so they think they're *missing* something. They don't realize that it's all there, still — that they just didn't have to wait three months for it.

Jim and John continue jawboning on page 75.

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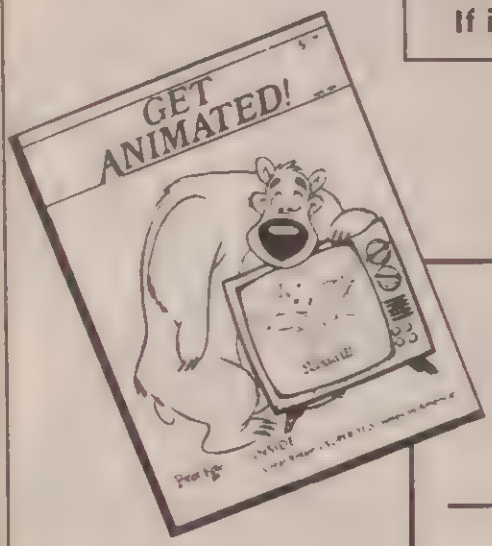

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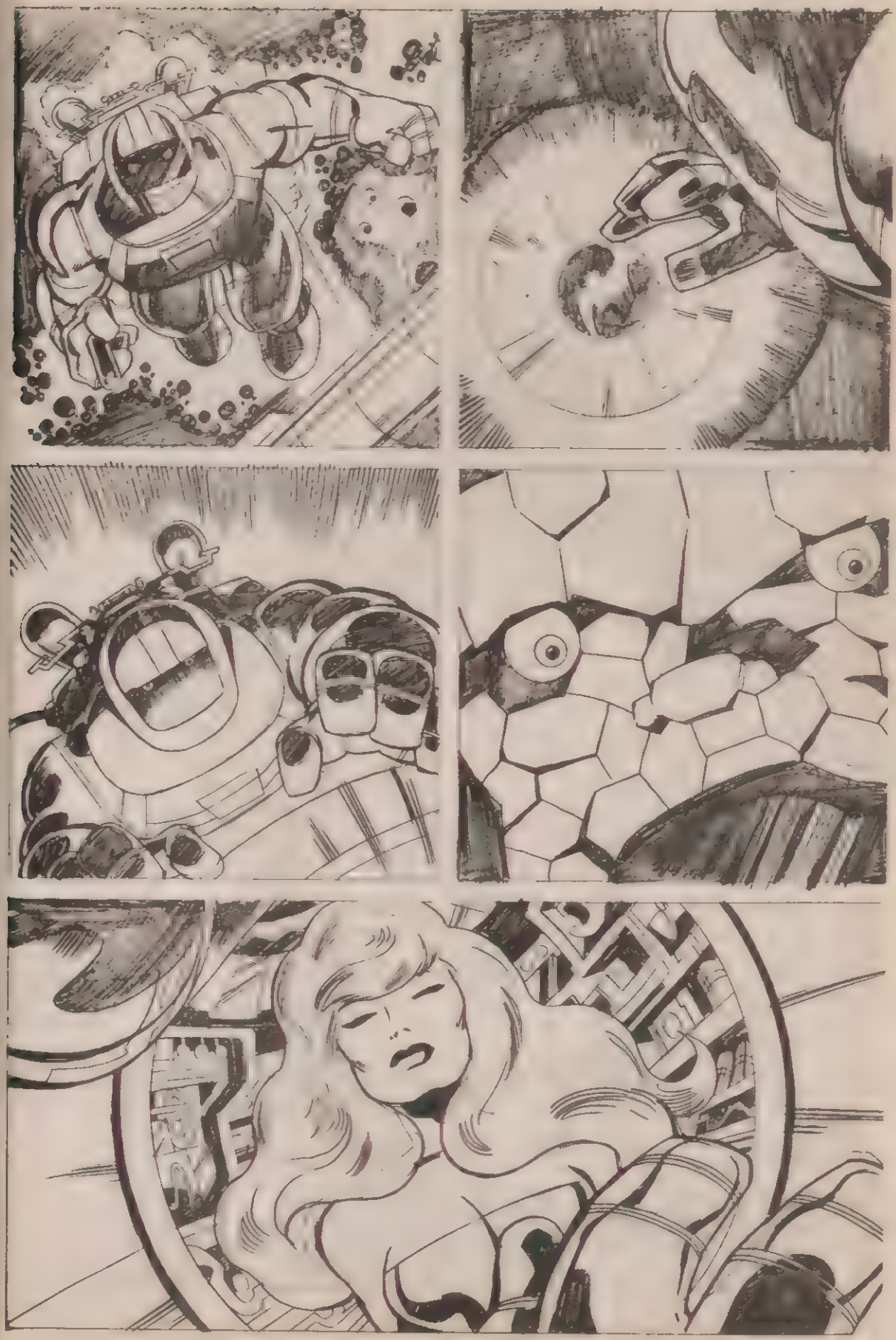

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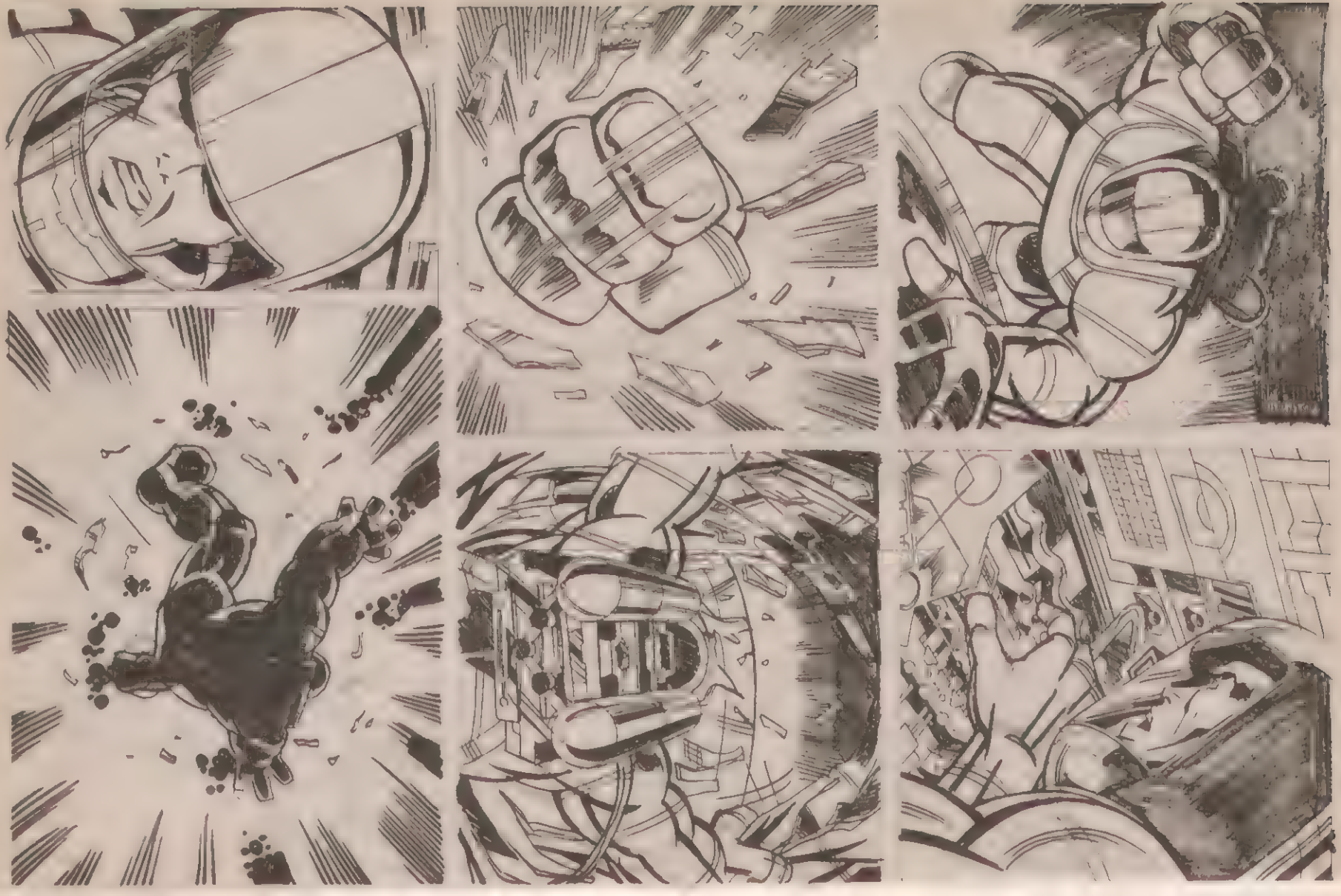

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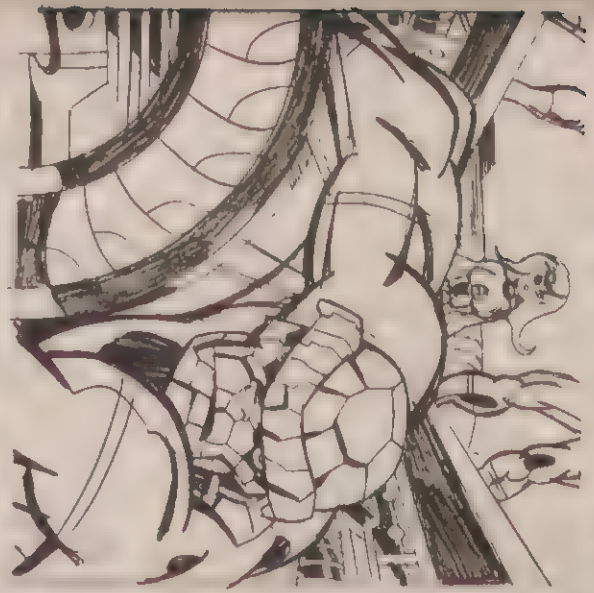

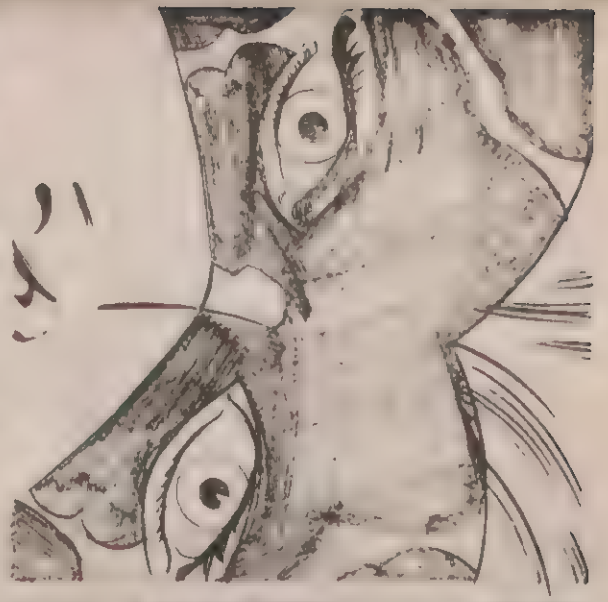

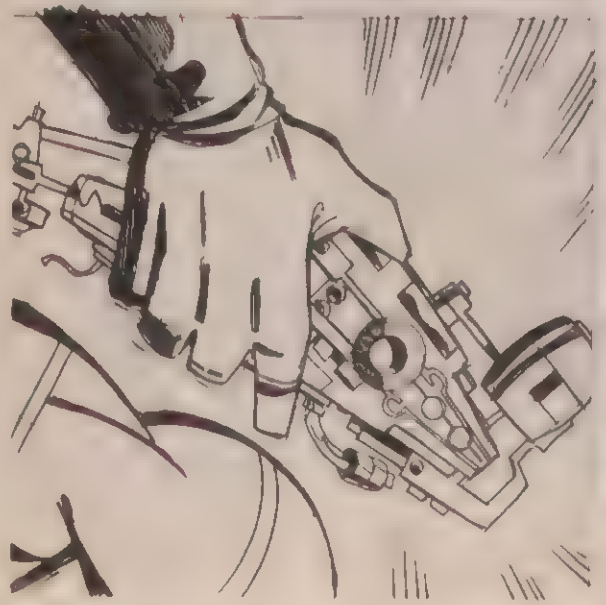

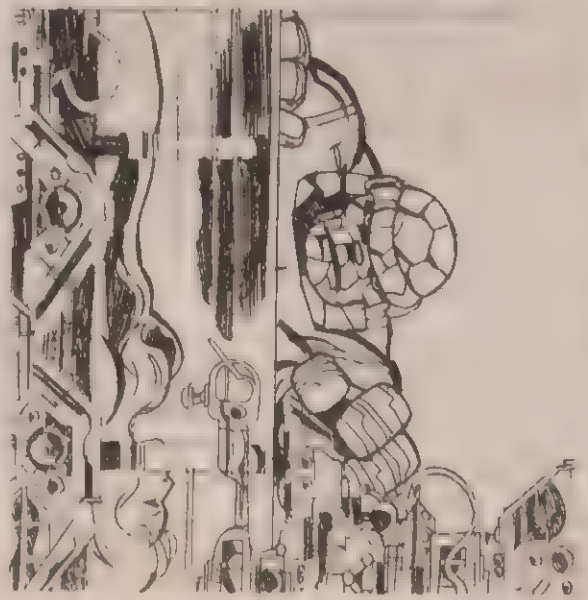

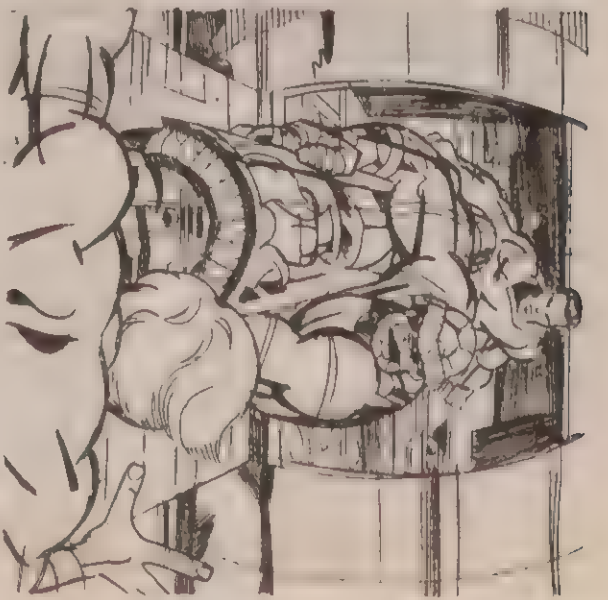

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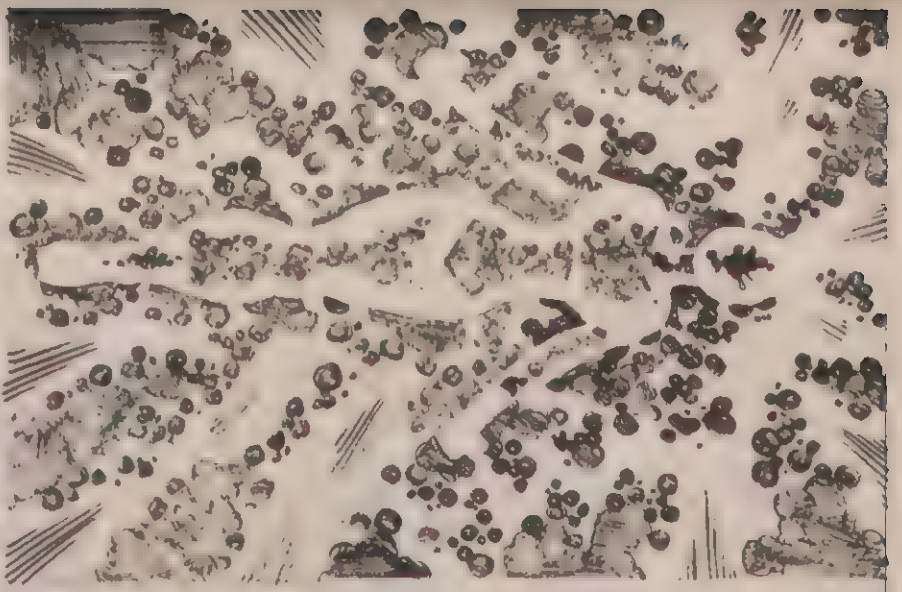

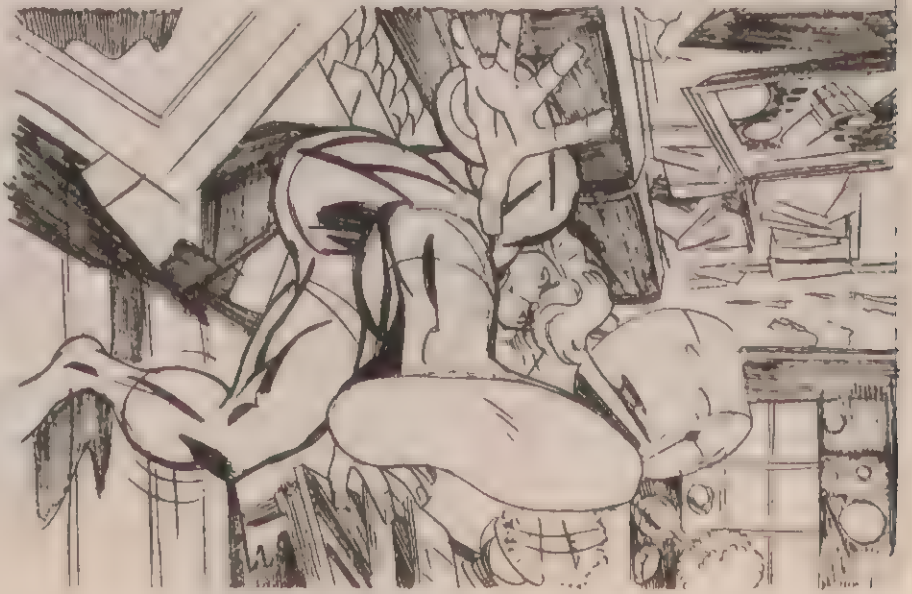

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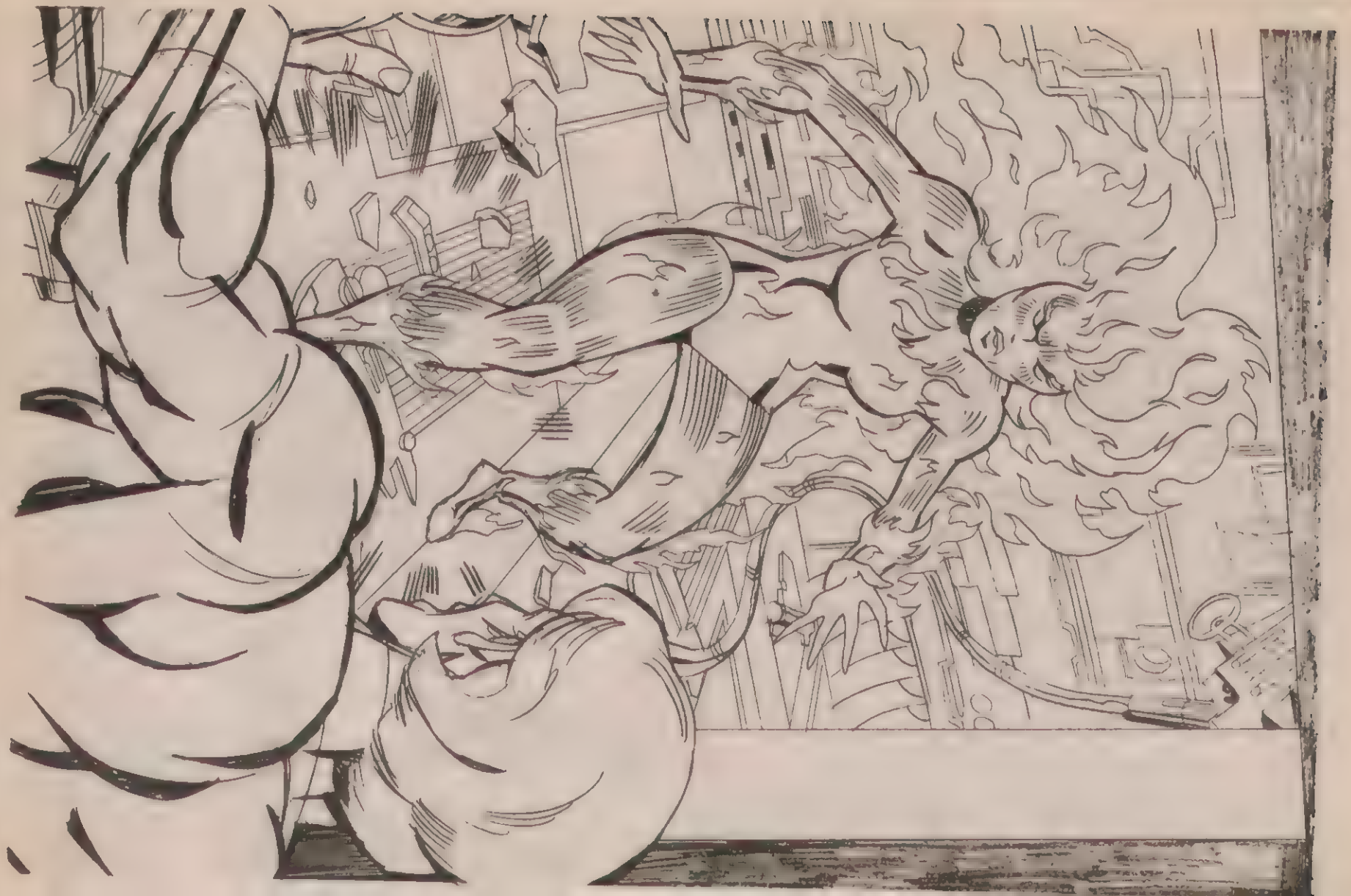

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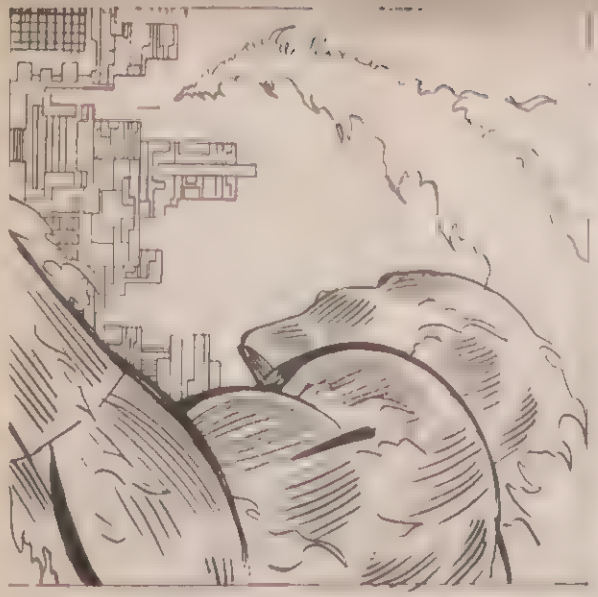

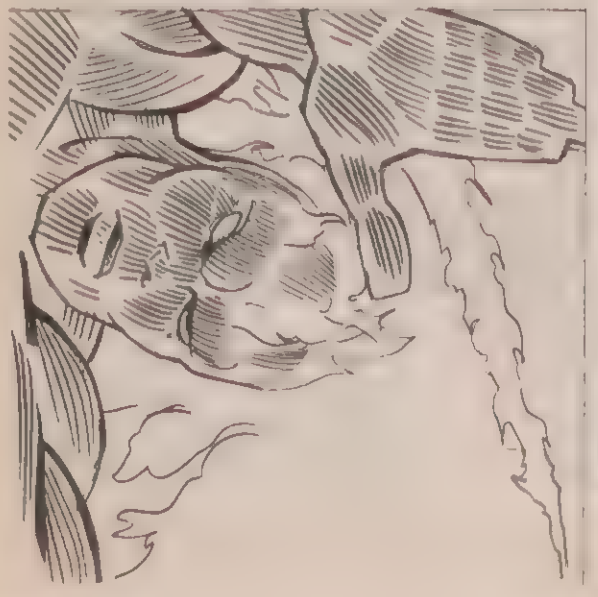

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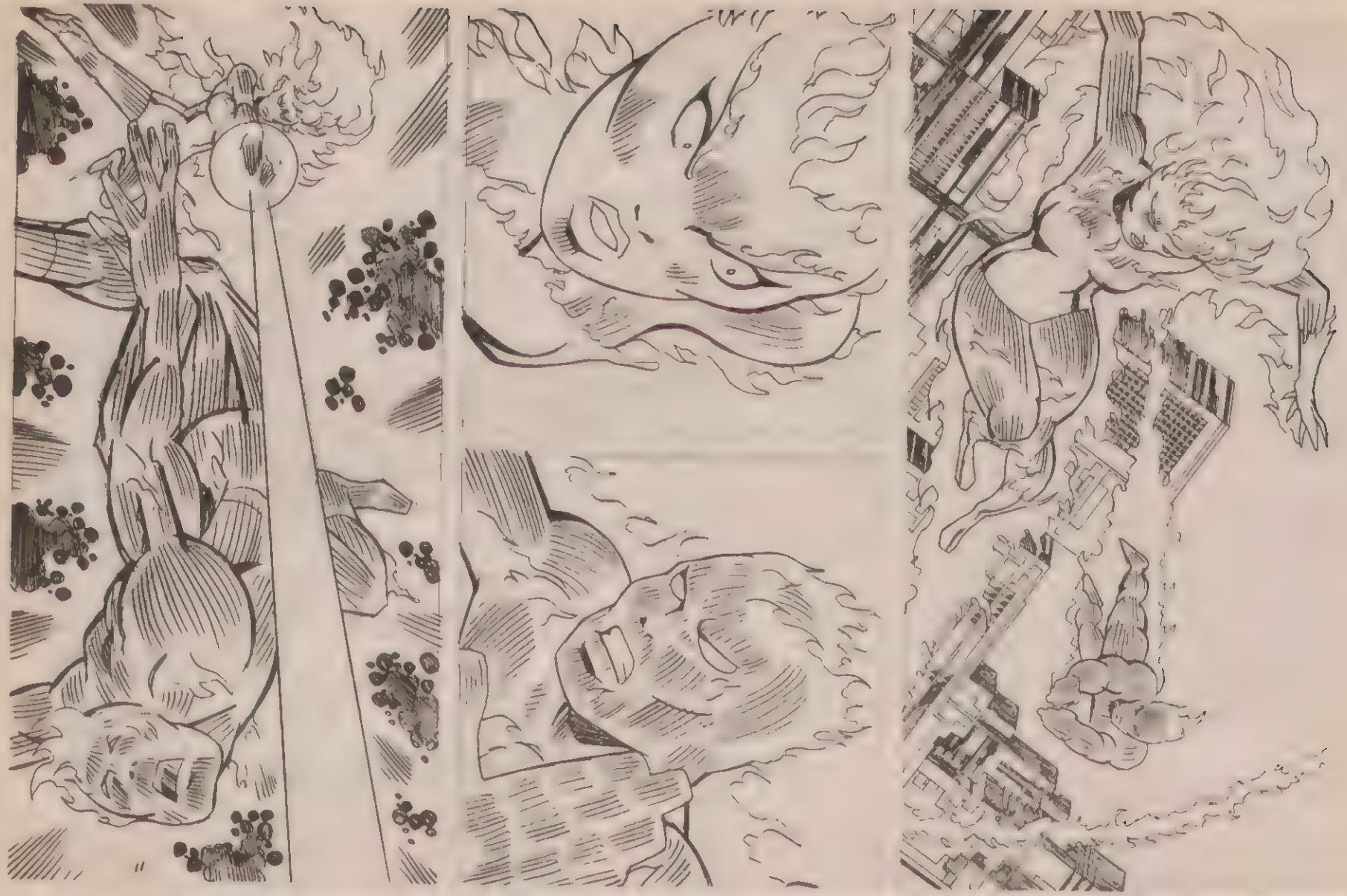

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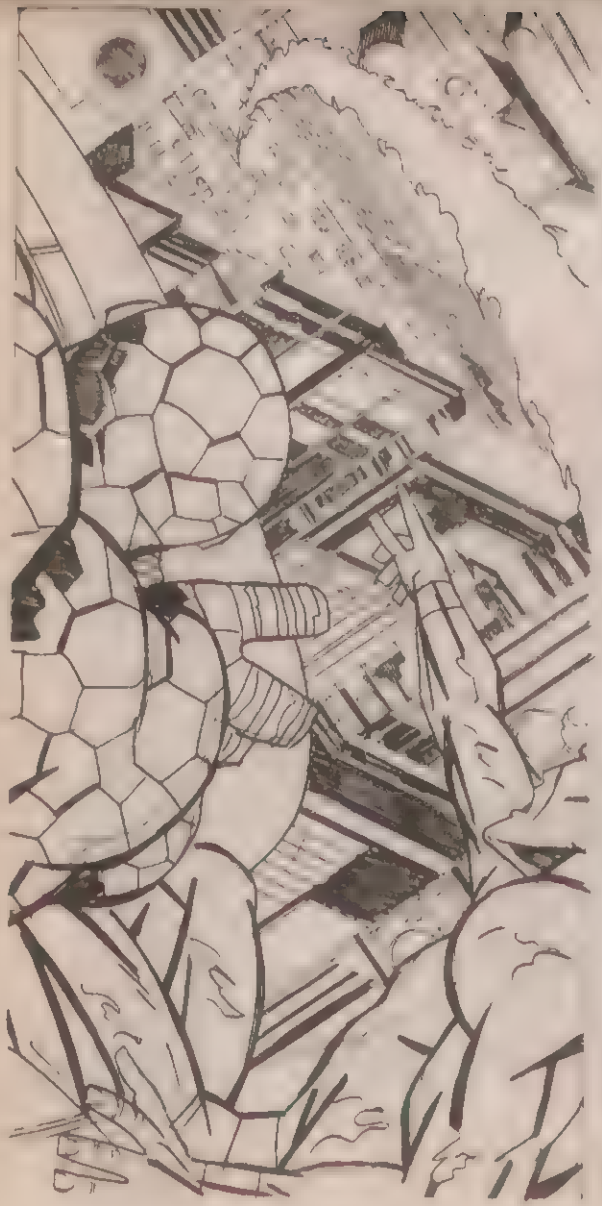

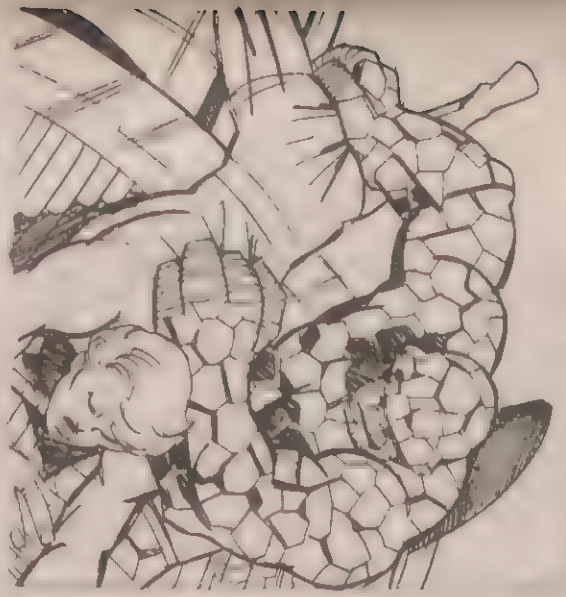

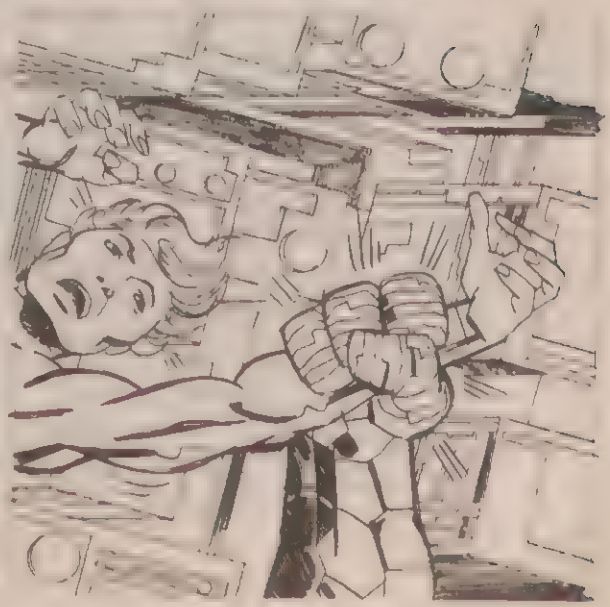

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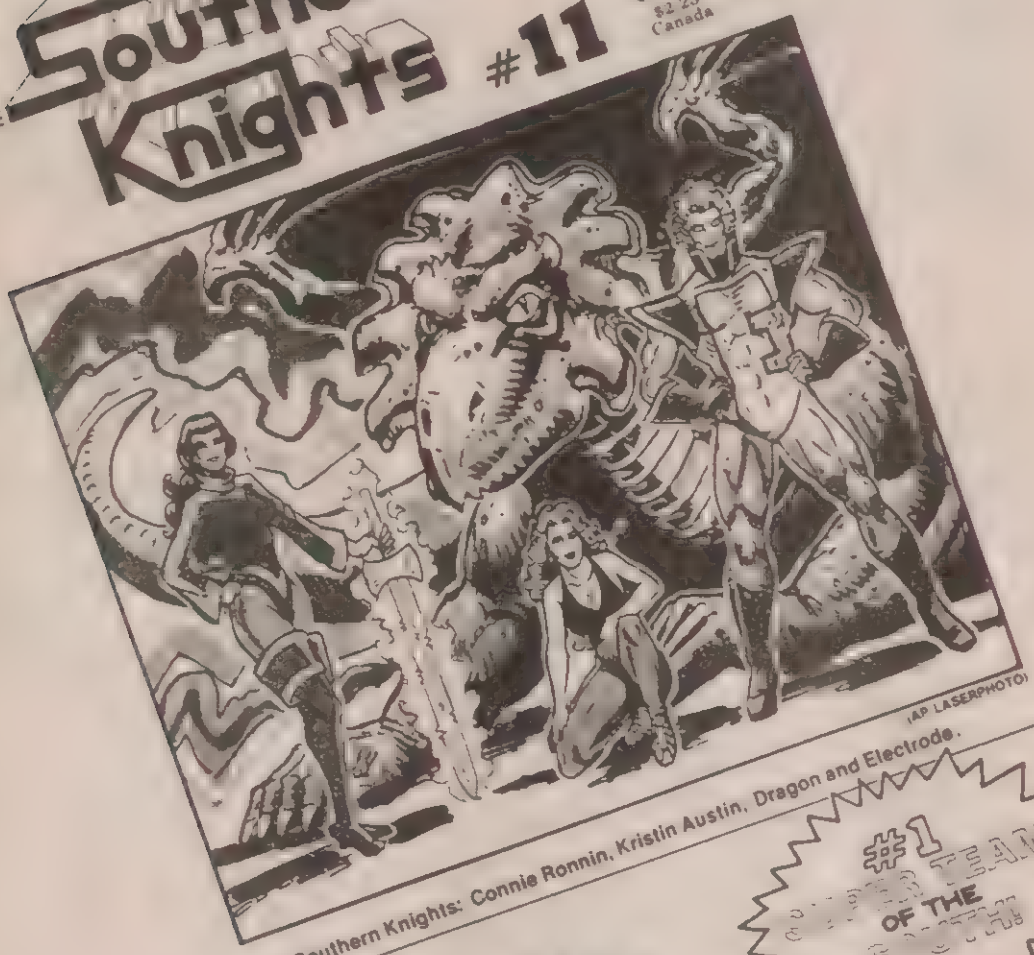

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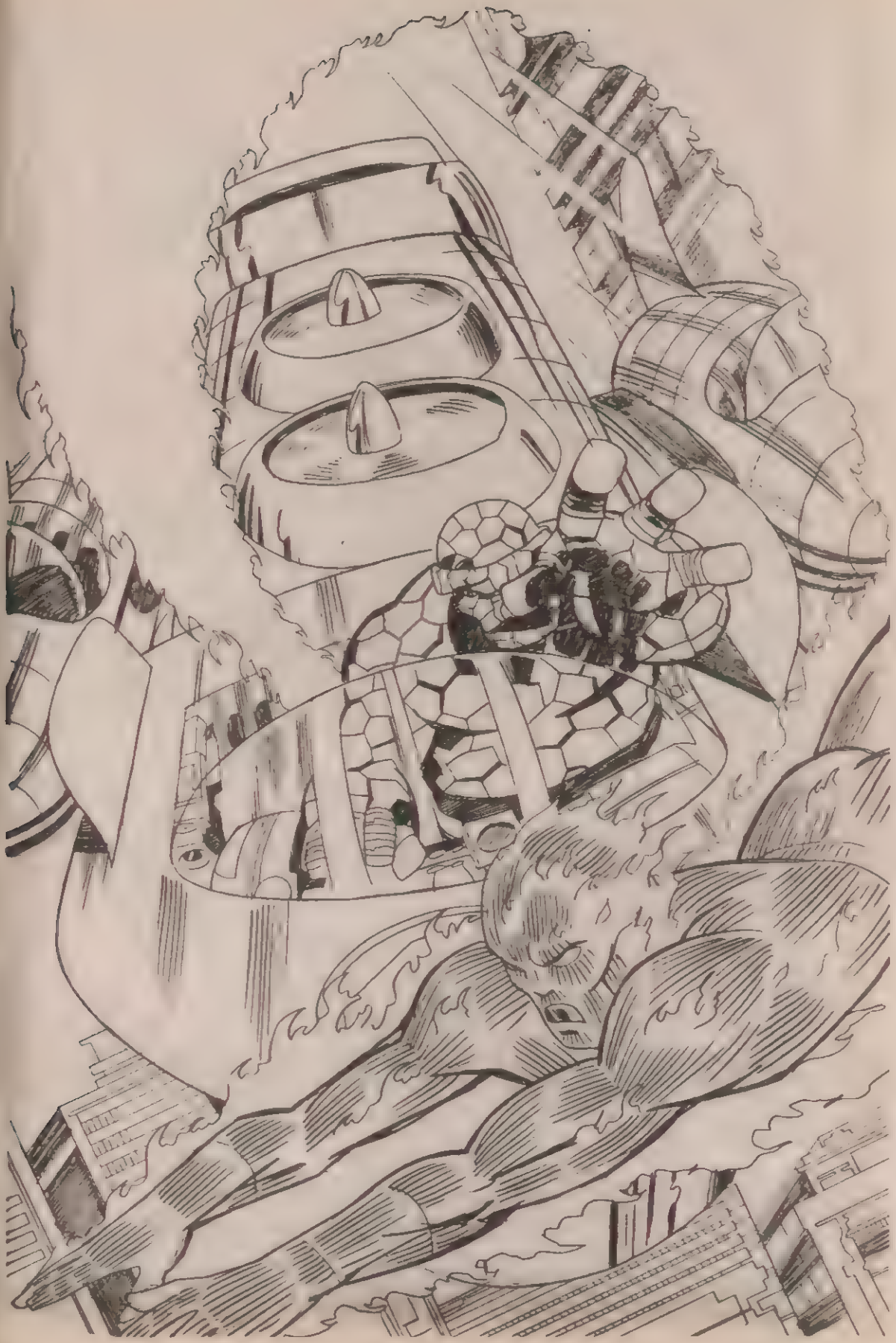

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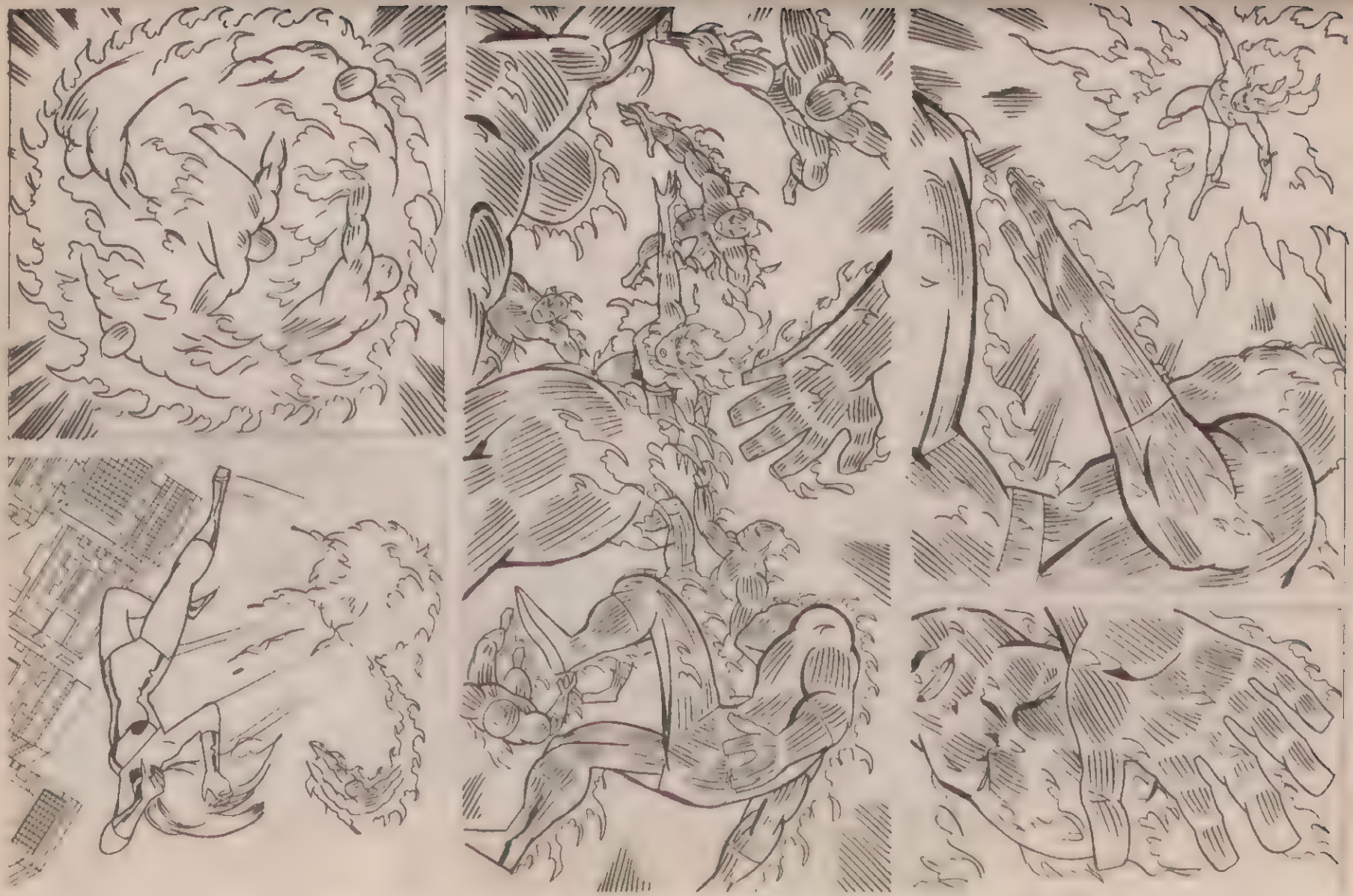

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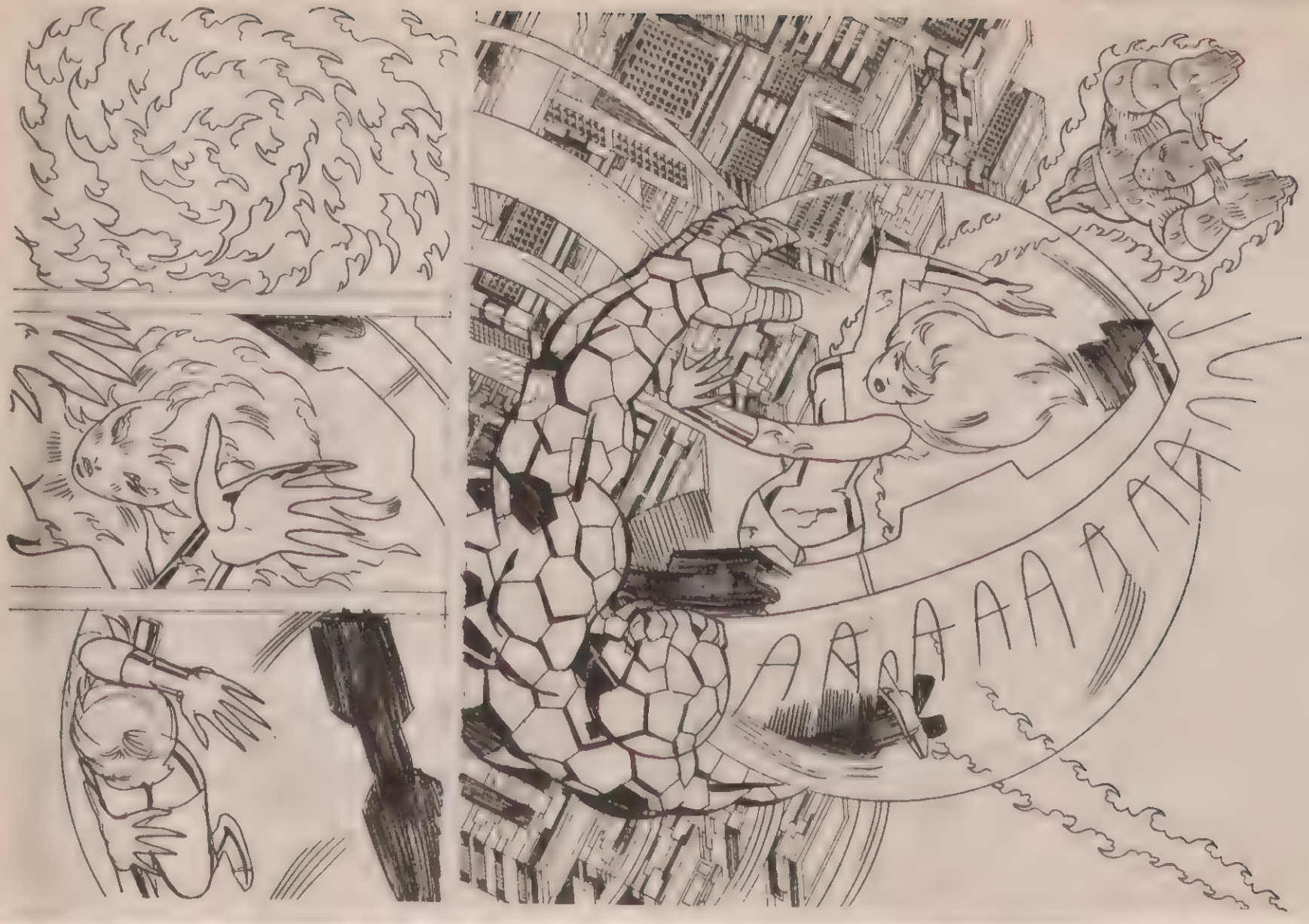

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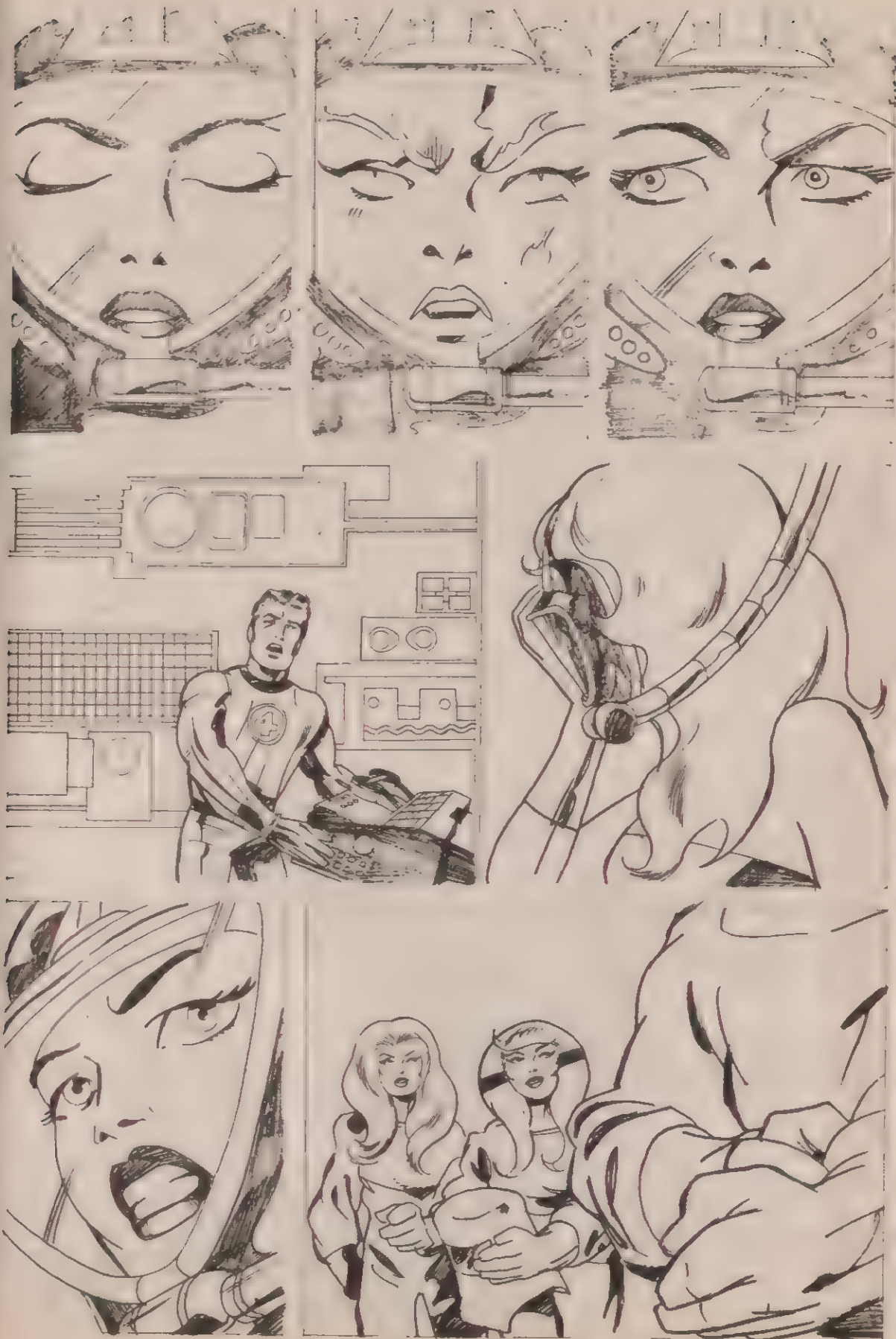

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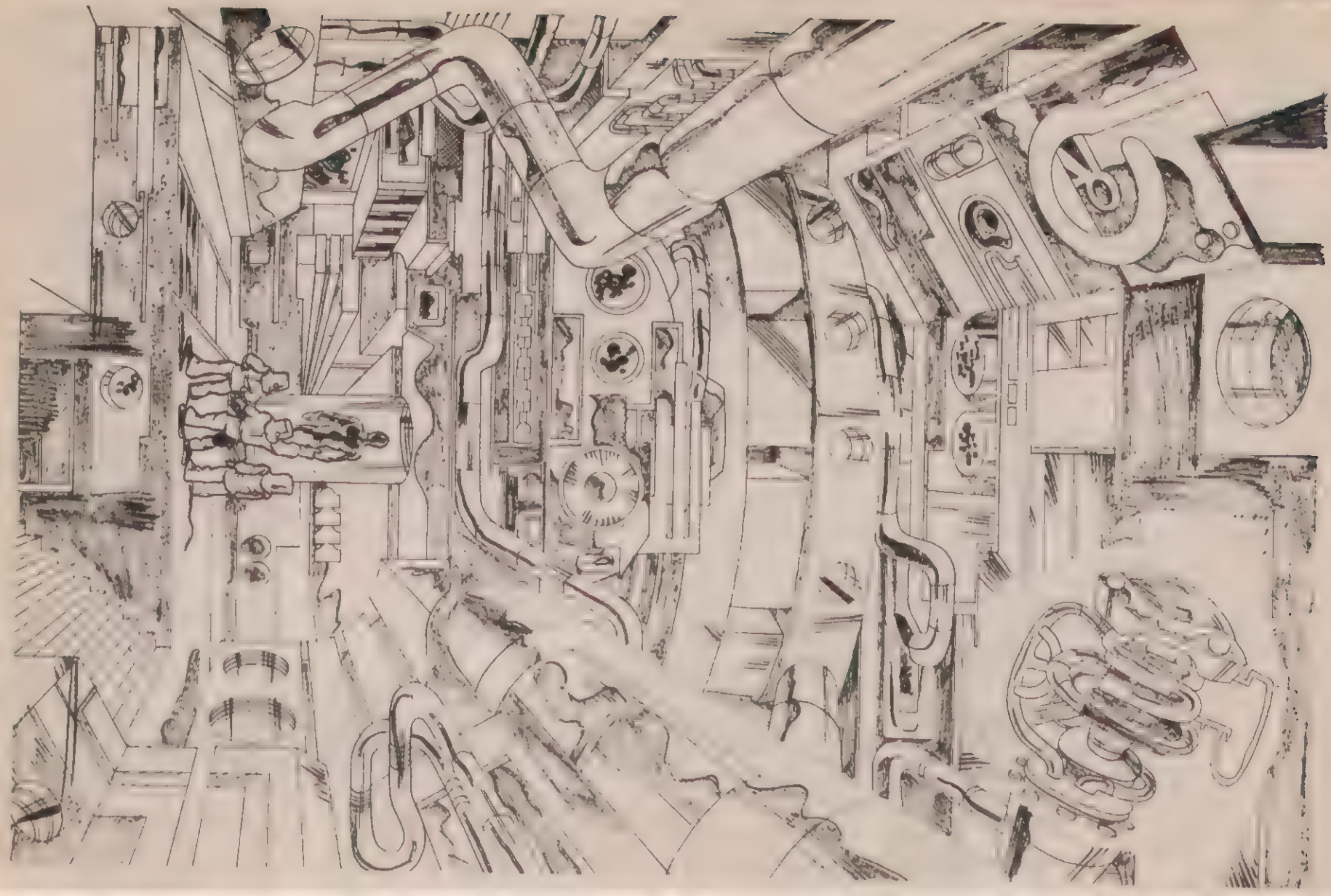

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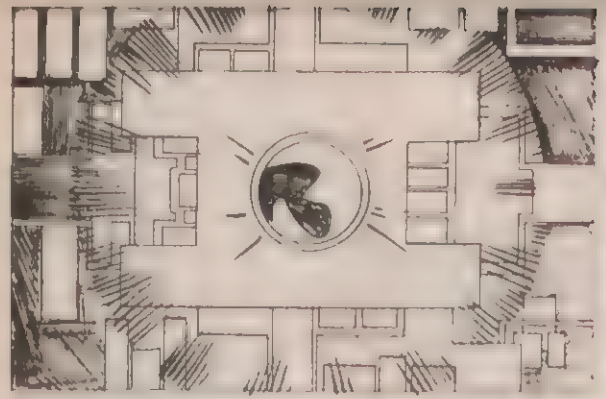

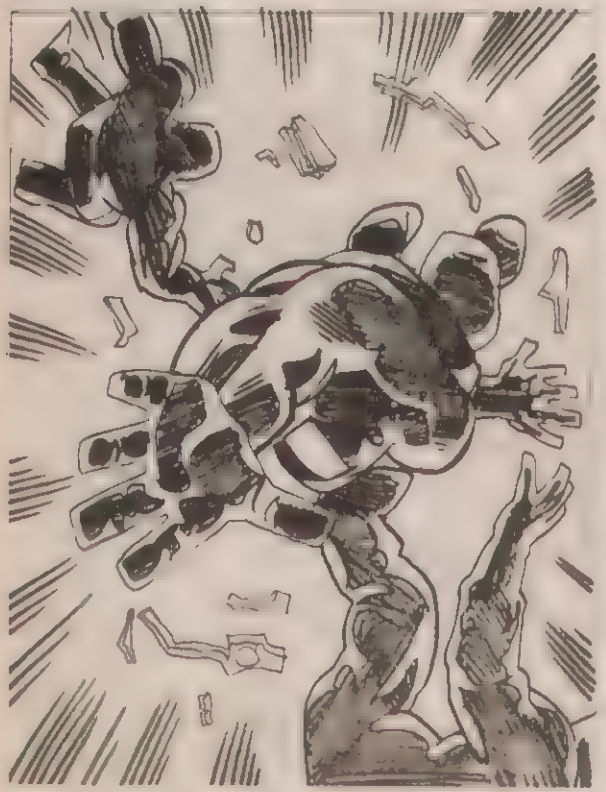

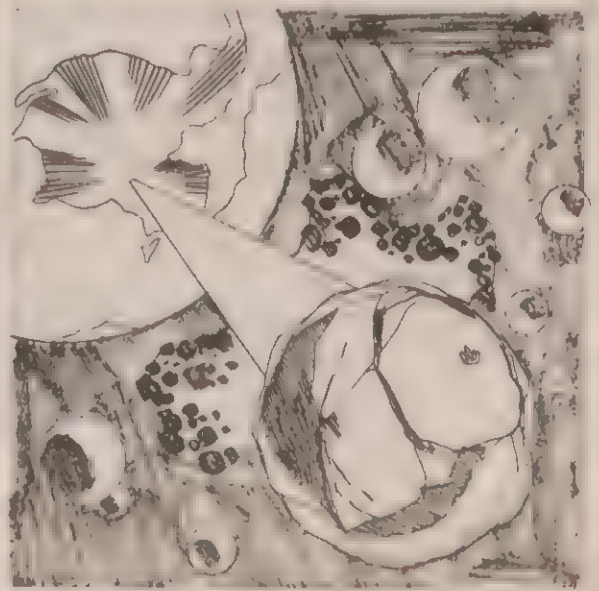

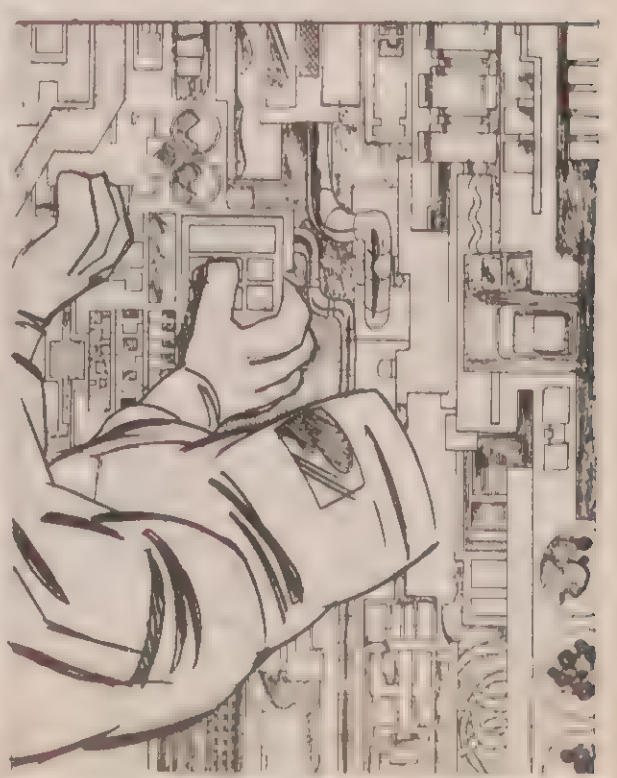

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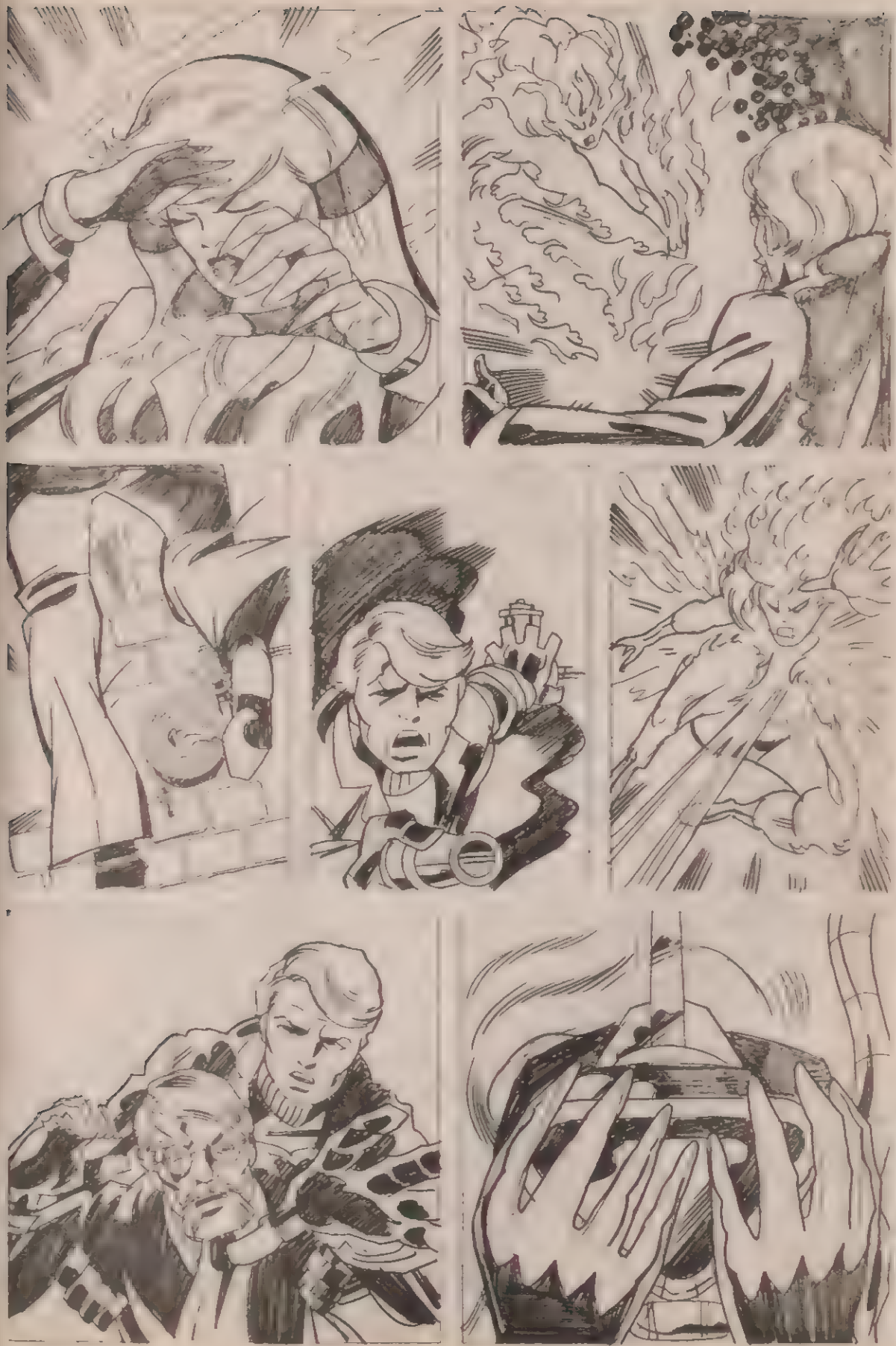

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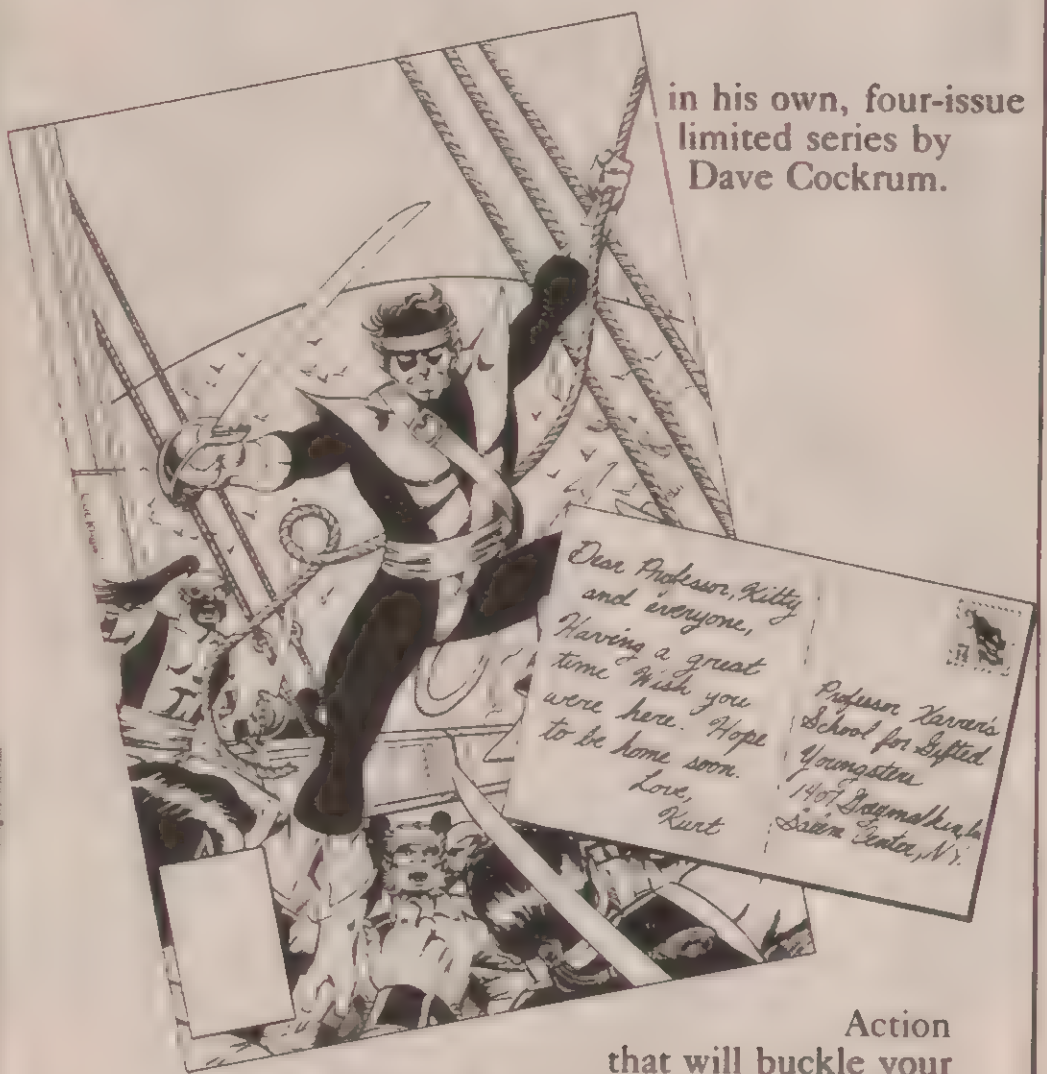
From the pages of the X-MEN
The fuzzy elf, himself. . .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Having a great time. Wish you were here. Hope to be home soon.
Love,
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"I *love* superheroes. But don't say you're doing something bold and new, then do superheroes."

JIM: *We've been talking a lot about the fans — are they really of one mind?*

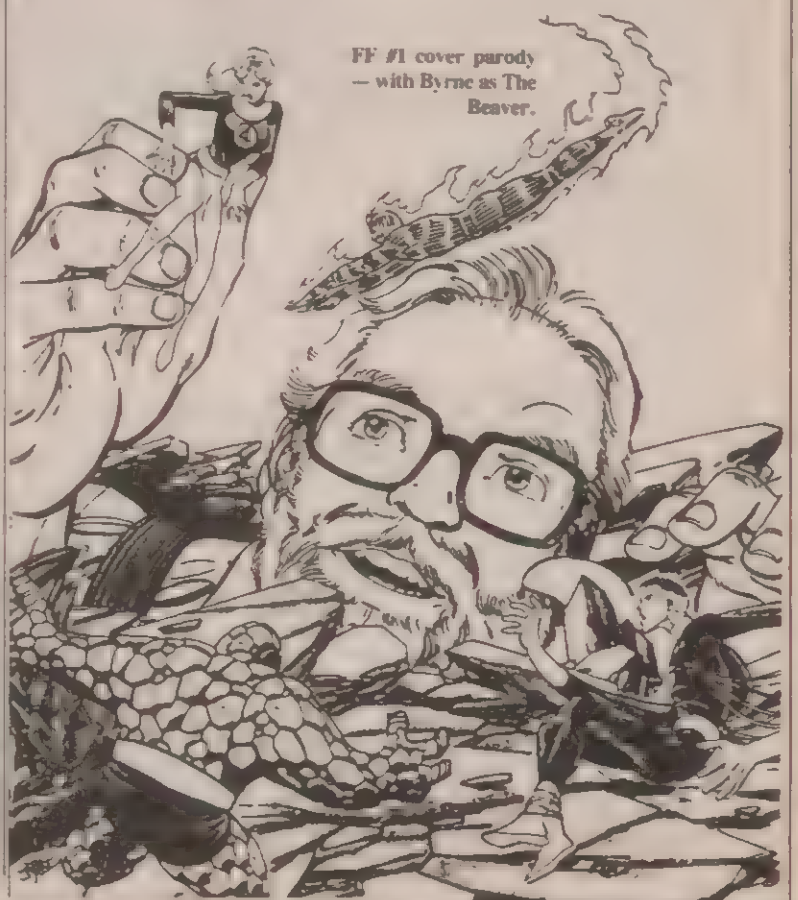
JOHN: I think that the *fans* are, because I distinguish in my mind between the *fans* and the *readers*, okay? When I speak of the readers, I'm talking about the two hundred thousand people who buy the FANTASTIC FOUR every month. When I'm talking about the *fans*, I'm talking about these really hard core people whose whole life is following every line of this and memorizing it and cross-referencing it and putting it all in plastic bags. And from my experience with them at conventions they seem to *be* of one mind. I can go to Philadelphia, or I can go to Dallas, or I can go to San Francisco, or I can go to Vancouver, Canada, and I can hear exactly the same questions asked by apparantly exactly the same people. So much so that I went to dinner at a friend's, a former teacher and a friend of my wife's, a few years ago. He asked me a comics-related question, and I answered him, ta-da-dump. And he said, "You've been asked that before, haven't you?" Because I instantly went into my Answering-A-Fan's-Comic-Related-Question mode. Because it *is* all the same questions and they all ask the same thing and they *all* make the same suggestions. And when you've been going to Cons for ten years, as I have, you start to realize that there is this level they all hit and that's the capital-"F" Fans. There's three stages that I perceive: there's the *readers*, there's the small-"f" fans, then there's the capital-"F" Fans. And when I say fans, I generally mean the capital-"F" Fans. The really hardcore ones... who are, in essence, not the people I'm writing for. I'm writing for the readers, and the small-"f" fans — the ones who are like I was, or **Roger Stern** was, who hit a point in their lives where they crossed a magic barrier. And they didn't cross into capital-"F" Fandom, they crossed into Pro-dom. They became the people who *do* the comics. And that's the significant difference — similar kind of mentality, just we're getting paid for it. That's what makes the difference to me.

JIM: *Well, that's interesting. I don't think I'm ready to really accept that yet; fortunately, I keep a very low profile. I'm able to remain behind the scenes and go to conventions and just see what people think. Every Sunday I make my rounds to comic-book shops and I like being able to overhear what people are talking about, and when it's on that level — when they're not talking to a John Byrne or a Stan Lee or whomever — they'll say the things they're really feeling. What you've just described doesn't just apply to comic books.*

JOHN: Oh, no — I don't think it does.

JIM: *Anyone who goes out to promote a movie, a book, and goes on all the different talk shows, will be asked the same questions over and over again. They're all given the same information — it's self-perpetuating. Once it's written down that you've been asked a certain question, or you gave a certain answer, when someone gets the opportunity to see you, they feel, "Oh, this is a Question-and-Answer thing. What question can I ask? Oh... I remember a question he was asked... " I've seen some fans who just are so in awe of being with professionals that they just don't know what to say. And so they'll use these typical questions as a crutch, "Well, uh, what kind of pen do you use, John?"*

JOHN: Well, that kind of question doesn't trouble me. It's more the "Why did you kill Phoenix?" kind. *(Laughter.)* That's asked with such intensity. It's more the intensity than the question itself. You know, it's when you get somebody who seems to be vibrating on a slightly different frequency from the rest of the universe, asking why we killed Phoenix. And when we get the poems and death threats... I mean it's the same thing that **Arthur Conan Doyle** ran into when he killed off Sherlock Holmes, and he had women writing to him that they were going to marry Sherlock Holmes, and how could he have done this. That mentality exists in everything. I'm sure stamp collectors have a pocket of their group... but it's that mentality that's the most dangerous to listen to and, unfortunately, in a lot of the contexts it seems to be the mentality that writes the letters. Because we don't get two hundred fifty thousand letters every month. And the letters that we *do* get seem to reflect that level of intensity. You were talking about getting mail on the character instead of about, you know, what a great job you did writing this particular panel. I don't like to *print* letters that say, "You drew this very well," or "You wrote this very well," because — especially in the case of the writing, in theory I'm not writing this, I'm *reporting* it. You know,



FF #1 cover parody — with Byrne as The Beaver.

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"On FF I did three months of letter columns

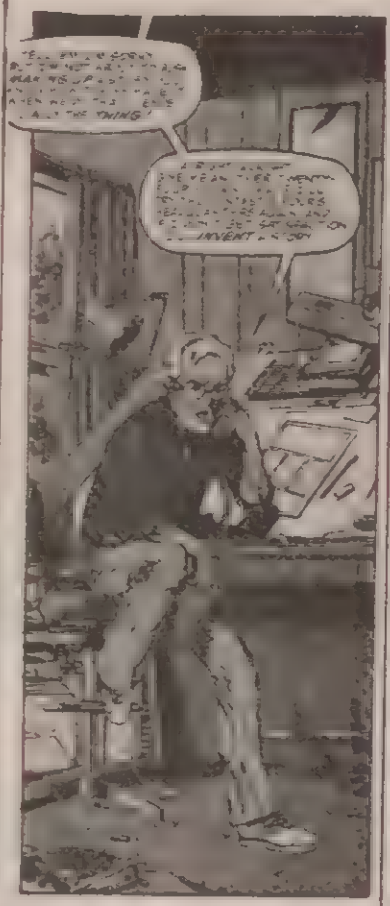
what we really want is, "Sue expressed herself well in this sequence," or "Boy, you really captured Sue's personality." So, when I was doing the letters columns, I tried to avoid that kind of letter. I really want the kind of mentality that gets into comics as comics — just a fun kind of experience that they eventually grow out of

JIM: *You mentioned something earlier about people being conditioned to like the X-MEN or something like that. I think a lot of the audience is quite young, in some cases probably the first letter they've ever written in their life might be to a comic book. And the way most people seem to learn things is to emulate what's around them.*

JOHN: Well **Beppe Sabatini** or somebody wrote a column for one of the fan magazines, How To Get Your Letter Printed At Marvel. And I read that column and I know **Roger Stern** read it and memorized it, basically to know which letters *not* to print. *(Laughter.)* Because we don't want that kind of mentality, that if you think you can put PhD after your name you're automatically printed. And if you praise this, this and this point, you're automatically printed. I don't want those kinds of letters. As a matter of fact, revealing a dark truth, about a year ago, I was getting nothing *but* letters like that, for some reason, on the FANTASTIC FOUR. And so I did, I guess, about three months' worth of letter columns that were almost entirely *fake* letters. I took points from different letters, and I wrote a letter that represented those points, in order to *show* the people the kinds of letters I *was* printing. And it worked. Eventually I started getting the generalized letters, the letters that didn't say, "Well, you know, in panel three, page four, why did you use this particular line?" *(Laughter.)* The letters that were about the *stories* and about the *people*, rather than about my prowess or lack thereof, you know

JIM: *You mentioned that they're now conditioned to like the X-MEN?*

JOHN: Well, they go through phases, I've noticed. The fans go through phases where they will accept a book and they will grasp that book to their bosom, so that nothing can go wrong as far as they're concerned. And the X-MEN seems to be the book that's in that phase right now. Before that, we saw the MICRONAUTS go through that phase briefly, we saw SPIDER-MAN go through that phase for ten years. And the sad thing, really, is that when it ends — it ends abruptly. You know, it's the Tinker Bell Syndrome: stop applauding, and the book goes away SPIDER-MAN survived, but we see so many instances where a book peaks and holds that peak for awhile and then suddenly drops away. The fans throw a switch, and I think a lot of it has to do with this kind of compulsive buying. I remember when I was still a fan and I was buying VAMPIRELLA *(laughter)* and one day I sat down and realized I had two years' worth of VAMPIRELLA that I hadn't even cracked the cover on. You know, I just bought it and put it on the stack. So I stopped buying VAMPIRELLA, cold turkey. A lot of books coast that way, which is one of the reasons that I try to make sure there's some kind of weird shit happening every issue of the FANTASTIC FOUR, so that they'll feel they *have* to crack the cover just to find out, even if it's only one panel where Alicia takes her clothes off or something. You know, there's going to be *something* in there that's going to make it worth looking



Byrne as "reporter."

JIM: *Well, I have to admit I'm sort of in the compulsive buyer category, still. Maybe these are bizarre justifications or rationalizations I throw up to myself, but the Marvel and DC stuff I get for free; what I tend to buy is all the other publishers' books. I work in comics, so I like to see who's out there, who's doing what. I don't necessarily read every one. I have them all stacked . . . there aren't really that many of them. It's amazing — when I finally got my bookcases in order, there's* tons *of old comics. There are more issues of FANTASTIC FOUR than Pacific, First, etc.*

JOHN: Combined

JIM: *Combined, yeah.*

JOHN: Well, I still find the only books I really pay any attention to are the Marvel stuff. Mostly because the other things have no effect on the Marvel Universe You know, I have to make sure I check out any time Dr Doom turns up somewhere. I look occassionally at the alternate press. I think alternate press, too, is such a wrong word, really.

JIM: *I'll go along with that.*

JOHN: When I look at all the stuff I've seen at conventions, the only one I think that qualified as "alternate press" while it was still running was ELFQUEST. Because it was the only title that was doing something you couldn't find somewhere else. You know, all the other stuff seemed to say, "Here we are, we're doing *alternate stuff*." Then they'd give you super-heroes . . . super-heroes, super-heroes . . . I *love* superheroes. But don't come at me saying you're doing something bold and new and innovative and then do super-heroes!

JIM: *Yeah. I think a lot of it is just that things get stuck with strange names that don't apply. There's a lot of that — for instance, are these really comic books?*

JOHN: They're not comic, and they're not books

JIM: *Or, in the collecting sense, are these things minted? How can they be in mint condition if they're not minted? You know, the alternate press, in the loosest sense, I guess they are.*

JOHN: They're *trying* to build themselves up as being the Marvel of twenty-five years ago, the David to the giant Goliath. But that seems so silly to me, too. The hardcore fan mentality will be so down on Marvel, the giant of the industry that's consuming everything and supposedly driving the little guys off the stand by producing tons and tons of stuff that they *have* to buy. Well, you don't *have* to buy it. You don't *have* to buy everything that has the X-MEN in it. But if you do, we will put out lots and lots of stuff that has the X-MEN in it. And if we are the giant of the industry, it's because *you made us* the giant of the industry. Not because we somehow sabotaged everybody else. DC sabotaged themselves — we didn't have to do it for them. We are the biggest, I generally believe, because we're the *best*. We're not the best because we're the biggest. They buy our stuff because, if a kid is confronted with a choice between buying an X-MEN reprint book or the latest issue of DOG MEN by an alternate company, nine times out of

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that were almost entirely *fake* letters."

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This spread: From FANTASTIC FOUR #262, "The Trial of Reed Richards" — and John Byrne was there to tell the tale.

ten he's going to *know* instinctively that that reprint of the X-MEN will probably be better than the latest issue of DOG MEN

JIM: *Well, just so people don't misinterpret what you're saying, I don't think in any way you're trying to say you want these companies to go away...*

JOHN: No. I don't want them to go away..

JIM: *Another reason to defend* my *compulsive buying is I think there* should *be a lot of comic-book companies.*

JOHN: Sure. The worst thing that could possibly happen would be if Marvel became the only comic- book company. I mean not only would we get the Federal Trade Commission or whatever down on us, but if we had *nobody* to compete against, there'd be no reason to do the kind of quality stuff that we *do* do. The high level of quality, if it was just **Claremont** trying to outdo **Stern** trying to outdo **Byrne**, would soon degenerate to garbage. You really need to be able to say, "Hey, this TEEN TITANS book is pretty good; I'd better do better than that." Or, "Hey, this AMERICAN FLAGG is attracting a lot of attention, *I'd* better attract a lot of attention too." So... I don't want them to go away, I just want them to stop pretending that they're the Davids to our Goliath.

JIM: *But it's hard to combat that — the more you do, the more they're convinced that —*

JOHN: I suppose the bottom line is really, once again, don't bother to listen to the hardcore fans. Because the kids, who are represented by the sales figures, seem to like it — you know, Marvel, AMAZING HEROES has the hundred comics list and they break it down percent-wise and Marvel comes out with something like fifty-eight percent of the market. And that's not because of any devious, awful, terrible, tricky thing Marvel is doing — that's because fifty-eight percent of the comics the kids buy, the readers buy, are Marvel comics. And if the fans hate it, if the fans find themselves part of this knee-jerk "if it's Marvel it must be bad" reaction. Sure, Marvel produces a lot of shit. But what happens is that periodically Marvel cancels its shit and comes out with good stuff. And if that's shit, too, *that* gets cancelled

JIM: *Well, Marvel itself used the "We're the little guys battling the big companies" line beyond the point where it wasn't so.*

JOHN: Oh yeah, it becomes a joke, but

JIM: *I remember a story once about a radio interview with Stan and Jack. "What's it like going up against the big companies?" and the public likes making that generalization, likes those type of stories. I think Jack was not into the same promotional sales frame of mind that Stan was in, so he was very forthright in saying, "Well, you know, we're actually outselling these books now." I don't know if the story's true or not, but Stan supposedly took the microphone away and said, "No, no..." and continued something that was a very good way of getting Marvel exposure.*

JOHN: Being the little guy always helps, it's true. Everybody wants to root for the underdog. But the weird thing is — as soon as the underdog becomes a success, they instantly stop rooting for him.

JIM: *We're talking about conditioning. Everyone seems to be geared to become big and successful. But everyone dislikes what's big and successful!*

JOHN: We've inverted or perverted the old Horatio Alger Syndrome, so now we still want to be the president of a corporation — but if somebody else becomes president of the corporation, we hate their guts. And it's all so silly, I think. To me, it's just craziness. I think everyone should just get out and be the biggest and the best they can. I see ads, the current run of ads that Eclipse is doing, saying, "If you're too old for comic books, come and read us," or, "I'm so bored with Pow and Bam..." Maybe you are. So *don't* read our stuff. I think of comic books — the comic books that *I* do — as filling that level in the literary world that was once occupied by the likes of TOM SWIFT and NANCY DREW and THE HARDY BOYS. They are Juvenile Fiction. I use juvenile in a positive sense, but I know I'll get letters from someone saying, "Well *your* stuff sure is juvenile." (*Laughter.*) Because that happens every time I say this. Every time I say I write for twelve year olds, I get a letter from somebody that says, "Whoa, that last story *was* for a twelve year old." Well, twelve year olds are very bright, and very intuitive, and they know what they want, and they know what they're doing, and there's two hundred fifty thousand of 'em who buy my stuff every month, and there's nothing *wrong* with comic books being juvenile. Nobody expected TOM SWIFT books to mature. That's the major problem with the mentality of fanzines

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"We're producing more garbage than Stan & Jack..."

"I had planned right along for Frankie to become a female Torch, to eventually become a Herald of Galactus..."

ike the COMICS JOURNAL. I think that as those guys have — I almost hesitate to use the word — matured."

JIM: *Grown older.*

JOHN: — as those guys have grown older, they've expected the comics to grow older with them and are offended by the fact that they haven't. And that's not the point. The market of comic books — in my mind — is kids from about eight to about twelve — say three or four years' reach either side of that — and an adult should be able to look at a comic book with the same fondness that he looks at an edition of TOM SWIFT or NANCY DREW. And not be disappointed that the comic book story is not Ernest Hemingway. You know, "I just read an **Ernest Hemingway** book and this latest issue of the FANTASTIC FOUR in *no way* matches it..." *(Laughter.)* Well, no, it doesn't. But, ever read any of **Ernest Hemingway**'s *juveniles*? They don't exist.

JIM: *The Eclipse ads seem to be an attempt to draw attention to their comic books; it's a marketing thing. Marvel has done a lot of marketing ploys or whatever. I'm not aware of where they're running that ad, I've only seen it in magazines about comics, which makes you wonder, because these are the people who are already aware of comics...*

JOHN: That's what I don't like about it — it's that snide, attacking approach which I don't think is necessary. If you have a good product, you don't have to run the other guy down to say that your product is good. If they want to say, "Here are our comics which are mature and adult and grown up," — which personally I have yet to see — but "Here are comics which are mature and adult and grown up, come and read them" — they don't have to say "instead of this juvenile shit." Maybe there are people who like to read the juvenile shit. I like to read juvenile shit. I *like*, I *love* reading a TOM SWIFT book, still. I love reading WINNIE THE POOH.

JIM: *When I first started editing MARVEL AGE, I tried to explain to the writers a positive approach to promoting things. I haven't always been successful. Whatever the writers*

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"There's more good stuff and there's more garbage."

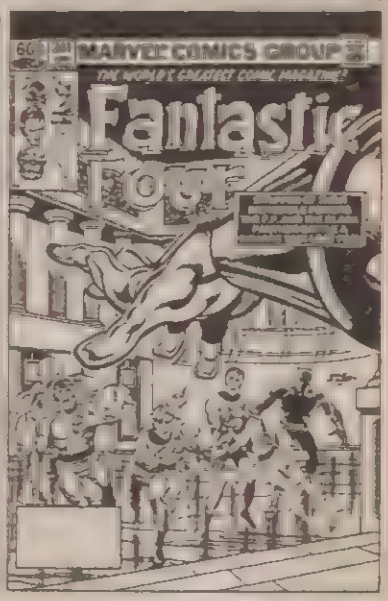
and artists on a given book are given a chance, a lot of them are unable to articulate and explain what is wonderful about what they are doing, the shorthand they always use is, "Well, this is good, because other things are bad." You know, like, "This has never been done before." They're not talking about what they are doing. I think if you can talk about what you are doing and make it sound like the most interesting, sensational, fascinating stuff — especially if it is — then that, by itself, will attract readers. However, what Eclipse is doing is close to what the Marvel approach was, a David and Goliath thing. Yet Stan presented a view that the DC books and the ARCHIE books and the other comics were great for little kids — they were wonderful, but if you wanted a little bit more, then there's the Marvel stuff, which at that point did have a different style. Stan was adding all sorts of things that worked well with a slightly older audience. But many of those readers extrapolated it [illegible] in a way, we're a victim of those readers who want Marvel to grow with them.

JOHN: : It's like Avis [illegible] Avis was so successful at being Number Two that they became Number One. And so they have to change their whole approach. "Avis, we're *still* trying harder." Things like that. Marvel has been caught by that, but there's more to it than even that. There's the fan mentality that somehow wants it to be — here's what I'm reaching for — wants it to be very cliquey, and very much a personal discovery. One of the things with the X-MEN, for example, that I keep waiting for is when the fans realize that there's three hundred fifty thousand copies of the X-MEN being sold, and suddenly jump to DAZZLER, you know, because there's only one hundred thousand copies of DAZZLER being sold. Something in the fan mentality wants it to be very special, unique: "Only *I* have this wonderful thing."

And so, if Marvel is the giant of the industry, then we're not that wonderful, special, private experience any more. The thing is that Marvel is no different now than it was then — in the sense of the level of stories. We're producing more garbage than we did when Stan and Jack were doing it, because we're producing *more books*, so that naturally both percentages have risen. There's more good stuff, and there's more garbage. The garbage we weed out — we just cancelled seven titles, that's the first sign. We're cancelling those seven titles to bring twelve more. This is not a sign of Marvel imploding, by any stretch of the imagination.

JIM: *In a way that stuff could also be viewed. I'm sure they wouldn't want to look at it this way, as biting the hand that feeds them, if Marvel said, "Gee, you guys are right, we certainly are flooding the market, in the next year we're not going to publish any Marvel Comics," that probably, you know, would be a disasterous blow to all these bookstores that depend on Marvel books to pay their rent every month.*

JOHN: That's one of the things that really offends me when I go to conventions and I talk to the people from the comic-book stores, and *they're* talking about what *shit* Marvel puts out. That's when I say, "Okay, lemme get your name and address and we'll stop sending you our books, so you won't have to deal with this garbage that offends you so much." You know, it's just... leave us alone, we do a good job. I like it. And when we *really* do something awful, tell us, but don't give us this, "It's Marvel, therefore it's bad," because it isn't. Spin the comic rack, and once upon a time we were producing forty titles and four of them were readable. Now... we've swung the other way, we're producing forty titles and thirty of them are readable. Twenty five of them are *very* readable, and *ten* of them are *great*! And I do *two* of 'em! Nyah! *(Laughter.)*



JIM: *I'll agree with that. Issue #241, remember, we'll get to the end of this soon* (laughter) *was a sort of an Indiana Jones-ish type feel... also incredibly drawn.*

JOHN: That was one of the last that was done in breakdowns. Well, the first one that wasn't done in breakdowns was the Sideways Issue, which most people don't realize 'cause the people who heard that I stopped doing breakdowns and was going straight to ink and came at me would usually pick an issue about ten issues after it happened as the starting issue to complain. The Sideways Issue was the first.

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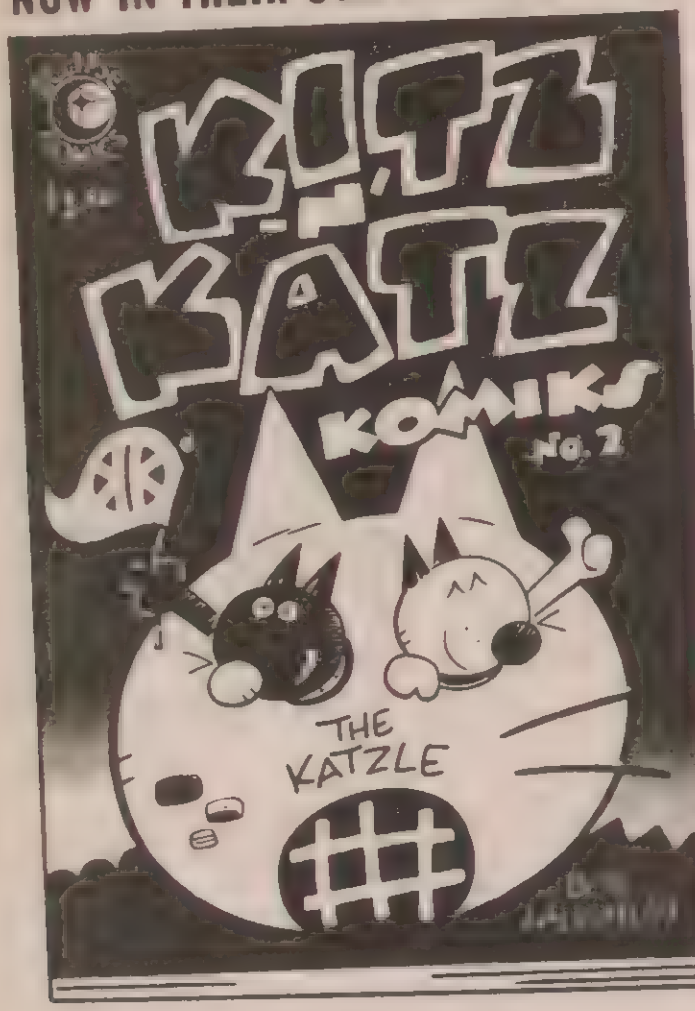

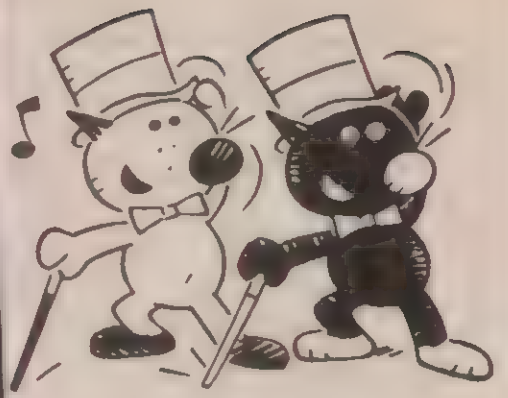

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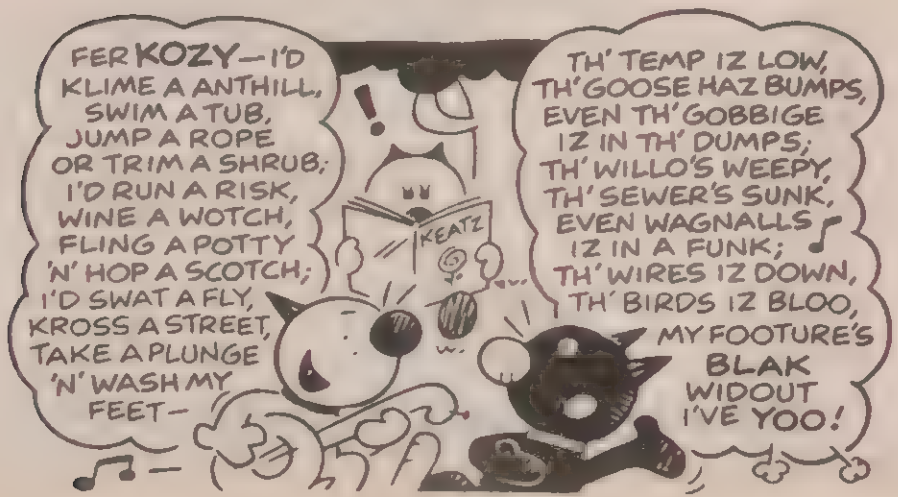
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KEATZ
TH' TEMP IZ LOW, TH' GOOSE HAZ BUMPS, EVEN TH' GOBBIGE IZ IN TH' DUMPS; TH' WILLO'S WEEPY, TH' SEWER'S SUNK, EVEN WAGNALLS IZ IN A FUNK; TH' WIRES IZ DOWN, TH' BIRDS IZ BLOO, MY FOOTURE'S BLAK WIDOUT I'VE YOO!

"They had no interest in doing Indiana Jones."

RAIDERS © 1982 20th Century-Fox

JIM: *Speaking of Indiana Jones — remember INDIANA JONES?*

JOHN: Um-hum

JIM: *Want to recall our experiences with that?*

JOHN: Oh, no. I don't think we want to get sued by **Lucas.**

JIM: *Well, I'll start it off, and you can help me wherever you want... Marvel was going to do an Indiana Jones comic — THE FURTHER ADVENTURES OF INDIANA JONES, which I was supposed to edit. You'd done plots, you'd done sample covers... then we had problems with Lucas' licensing people. The people we had the problems with are no longer there, but what happened is, I think, the first adaptation of RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK was like most Marvel movie adaptations — done in a hurry while the movie's being made. The creators haven't seen the movie, and they're under pressure to get it in time for the movie's release. The Lucas people probably thought fondly of Marvel for coming out with the STAR WARS comic way before STAR WARS started. But when the RAIDERS adaptation came out, according to the licensing people, George Lucas wasn't thrilled with it. And they said he told them that when Marvel did the regular book "It better be darn good." You were presenting them with some of the best material they could have wanted, and they were just criticizing for the sake of making sure that Marvel wasn't going to get away with anything.*

JOHN: I think the problem was that the woman who was in charge of the whole deal didn't seem to understand, number one, that having approved the plot, she could not then ask for plot changes at the script level. You know, we tell her what the story's going to be in advance, she cannot come in when the whole book is done and say, "Well let's change this element," which is a plotting element. She didn't understand that it isn't a movie, so you can't just re-shoot scenes, that changing three panels on a page will often as-not mean having to re-draw half the book to get there.

And the biggest problem I had was that she confronted me with all kinds of stuff, picking apart my first issue, that if the same — literally — if the same rules had been applied to the movie, they couldn't have made the movie. "Well you can't have this and you can't have that, and you can't do that, and if you've got this element, why can't we have this element?" — and the thing that just drove me crazy was that it spoiled the movie for me. I can't watch that movie anymore without these same rules going through my head. I remember one instance in the first story I had Indie saying that "[The Ikons of Ikammanen" were just a story that Abner Ravenwood used to keep the class awake during boring lectures. And there was this thing from this woman, saying, "Let's see that story, let's hear that story." And I said, "But that's not what this is about. You want five or six pages of Abner Ravenwood sitting in front of a class telling a story?" Because that's not the point of this, and we would find out what that story was, when we get into the thing. It would be in effect saying you have to add an extra half hour or hour to the original movie to show how Abner Ravenwood *obtained* the headpiece of the Staff of Ra, and how Indie happens to know all this stuff, about why he happened to bring a Bible with him that has a picture in it of... So, since I'd been going along, at that point for nearly two years, with my well-trained editor *(laughter)* accepting that I knew what I was doing, it was just impossible to suddenly work with somebody who was going to be second-guessing me every step of the way.

And *I* felt really bad, because Shooter had said, originally, that they really had no interest in doing an Indiana Jones book, but then I said that I would like to do it, and Terry wanted to ink it. I spent many a sleepless night, quite literally, wondering how can I get out from under this mess when this mess

Byrne's brief stint on INDIANA JONES: "I have refused to do anything that even *smells* like licensing ever since." Art by John and Terry Austin for an untold RAIDERS tale.

"When Hollywood does comics, the first thing

really wouldn't exist if I hadn't asked for it? Finally I just said, "I can't work this way." I was getting offended, kind of in general, by the fact that whenever Hollywood does an adaptation of the comics, the first thing they do is take the comics and throw 'em away, and do whatever they want to do — and yet every time I've worked any kind of licensing thing, when the comics do Hollywood, Hollywood insists that everything be chapter and verse because their product is so perfect and so superior. And, you know, the bottom line is that I have refused to do anything that even *smells* like licensing ever since.

JIM: *Well in my own perverse view of the world, I consider your doing Marvel characters a form of licensing...*

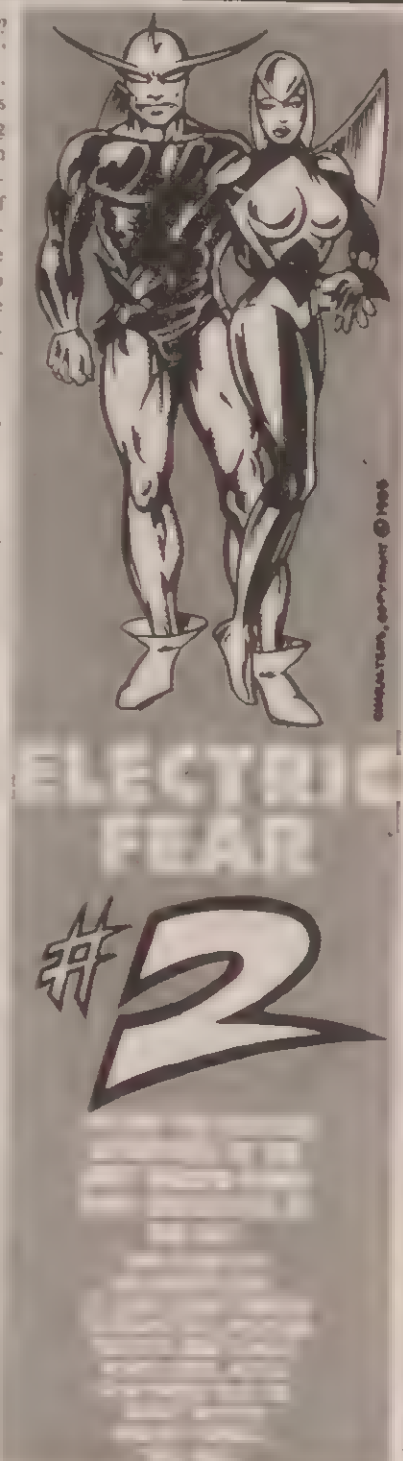
JOHN: But I consider myself as part of Marvel — I *am* Marvel Comics just as **Roger Stern** is Marvel Comics...

JIM: *Here was a hit movie, everyone knew instantly who the characters were; I was, I guess, one of the people who thought that this could be a big-selling title. And with you interested, I thought, "How can this possibly fail?" And since we were working well together — to the point where I was your "well-trained editor" — what could go wrong? When I started running into this wall with the Lucas licensing people, where I felt I didn't have any control over them, it put me in a strange position. What I did was say, "John, you talk to this person." 'Cause I didn't think I could represent her views to you. "Hey, John, you have to do all these strange things because they say so." I mean, I felt, "We're human beings here, maybe if John rationally and reasonably talks to this person, they'll come to some understanding," or "Can't they see that we're... ?" It was just a frustrating experience. What they wanted was exactly what they were going to get if they just left us alone.*

JOHN: Um-hum.

JIM: *Maybe I shouldn't have had you deal with them directly.*

JOHN: I never really got as far as actually confronting this woman face to face. We were going to go to California at one point, and I said, "Here's my chance, I'll try and arrange some kind of meeting at Lucasfilm." The last gasp I ever heard, which I think sums it up perfectly, how this woman really didn't understand that she was dealing with a different medium altogether, was talking to **Tom DeFalco** about the *second* Indiana Jones adaptation, TEMPLE OF DOOM. I was talking about all the problems that I had and he said, "You think *you* had problems!" He told me that something like two weeks before the adaptation was to go to press, or two days or something obscene like that, she decided she wanted a different penciller on the book. *(Laughter.)* And, you know, he basically said, "What do you want us to do, lift the inks off and slide new pencils underneath?" It doesn't work that way. That's like saying the movie's going to be released in two days, we've decided to reshoot without **Harrison Ford**. This was obviously somebody who just couldn't make the connection that this was a different medium and you have to treat it differently. You get the plot, you approve the plot; you get the art and you approve the art; you get the script and you approve the script. But you cannot make changes in prior steps.



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JIM: *Well that's a continuing frustration, 'cause I work with lots of licensors for custom comics that Marvel produces, and these people are* spoiled. *They're used to dealing with advertising agencies, "The client is always right." And we're in a bizarre situation* (laughter) *where it's just not always possible. They* have *to be reasonable. And, anyway one of the changes they added in that first issue was some crazy scene of Indie using a student for whip practice or something... a cigarette in a student's mouth?*

JOHN: For some reason they changed the dating so it was several years later. In my version it took place immediately after RAIDERS, Indie sitting at his desk getting drunk because Marian's disappeared...

JIM: *Which was the page they used to advertise the book.* (Laughter.)

JOHN: But... it's gone. The bottom line was because of my absolute flat rule against doing anything with licensing now, I turned down THE LAST STARFIGHTER — which turned out to be a really neat little movie. And I would have liked to have had a piece of that.

JIM: *Well, don't be inflexible...*

JOHN: No, I *have* to be inflexible. It goes with my ego.

JIM: (Laughter.) *Let's talk about FF #242. You brought Terrax back — was that because when you were first drawing him you had different views of the character?*

JOHN: Yes, more or less. I wanted to see what he really looked like. Because, I had only done breakdowns, and **Sinnott** had inked it — you know, beautifully as **Sinnott** always does, but not in the way that I had in my mind — and which I couldn't express in breakdowns. So I was able to give him

they do is take the comics and throw 'em away."

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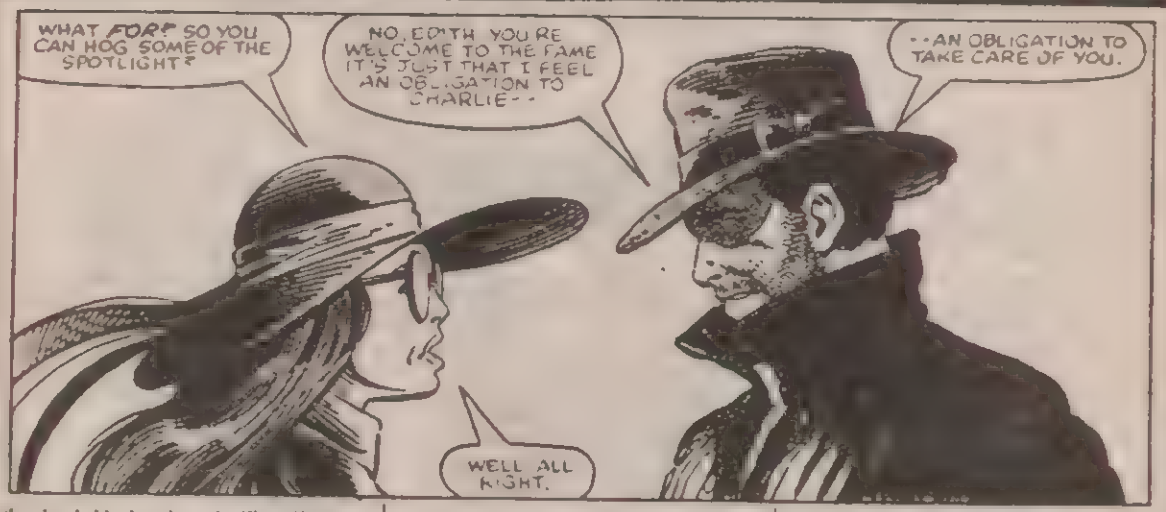
WHAT FOR? SO YOU CAN HOG SOME OF THE SPOTLIGHT?
NO, EDITH YOU'RE WELCOME TO THE FAME IT'S JUST THAT I FEEL AN OBLIGATION TO CHARLIE--
--AN OBLIGATION TO TAKE CARE OF YOU.
WELL ALL RIGHT.

the chiseled look and use the Zip-A-Tone and make him look stone-y. And then also get into who I figured this guy *was*, 'cause I thought he had been a bit of a wimp up until that point. That's the trouble . . . most villains tend to wimp out and the heroes win because the villain is a wimp, not because they're real good at what they do.

JIM: *Well, explain what you mean by that.*

JOHN: Take a character like somebody I intend to resurrect in THE HULK — The Ringmaster. The Ringmaster is *the* biggest putz in the Marvel Universe if you don't read the first Ringmaster story. The Ringmaster has been going around the country putting *entire towns* into hypnosis-induced comas, and the first indication we get of this is this dark town, where all the lights are out and people are just standing frozen on the street corners, and there's these FBI guys going around saying, "This is the third time it's happened . . . " And it's incredibly scary. And this is what The Ringmaster is all about.

But then subsequent generations come along and say, "Oh, he's silly looking." No, he's *not* silly looking. You're *drawing* him silly looking . . . playing him as a goof. A big argument I used to have with Chris all the time was he maintained that The Sentinels were wimps, and I finally said, "*I'll* give you a Sentinel story." So I plotted The Days of Future Past sequence in which The Sentinels kill everybody and take over the world. I said, you see, it's all how you write it. It's all how you approach the characters.

And I thought that some of the stuff where Terrax had appeared, he'd been diminished from even the *low* beginning that he started at. Everybody looked at him and said this guy — this petty dictator on this scummy little backwater planet — he must be a wimp. And

Who can find the Ikons. "I can," says Indie. Below: From Marvel's INDIANA JONES #1. Above: From #2.

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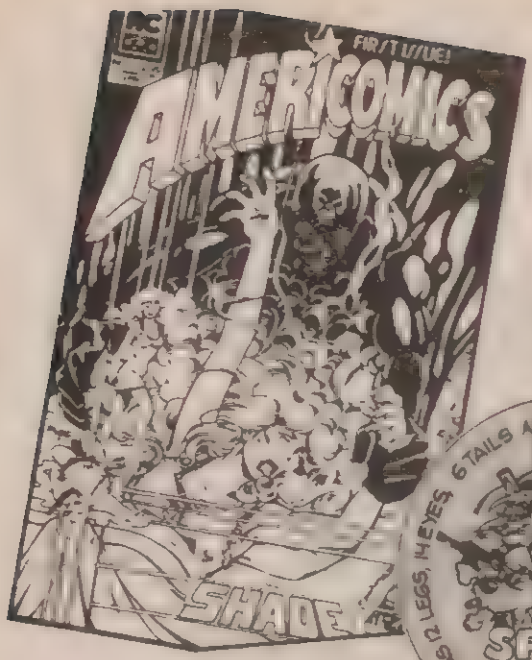

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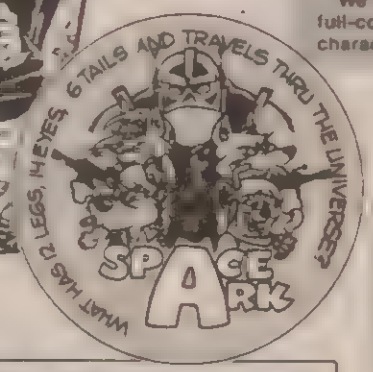

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- **Favorite cover:** (*New Teen Titans** #1)
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- **Favorite direct-only book:** (*The New Teen Titans*)
- **Two of three favorite books:** (*The New Teen Titans* and *Swamp Thing*)
- **Two of three favorite writers:** (Alan Moore and Marv Wolfman)
- **Four of nine favorite characters:** ("Amazing Man" Batman* Nightwing* and Swamp Thing)

When informed of the results of the poll, DC Vice President-Executive Editor Dick Giordano said, "We're working to make our books the best. It's gratifying to know the fans recognize and appreciate that. We thank them."

Dick Giordano

DC Comics. 50 years old and still the newest.

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"People toss me that as an insult, Company Man —"

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my reaction was to say yeah, he's a petty dictator on a scummy little backwater planet who was just given the POWER COSMIC, which is always spelled in all capitals... so let's treat this guy as, sort of, the Silver Surfer

Nobody ever treats the Silver Surfer as a wimp at the power level. You know, he's a wimp intellectually. Which he shouldn't be either.

But I said, let's get Terrax back on some kind of track here. This guy's *tough*, and first of all he's going to shatter the top stories of the Baxter Building and then he's gonna lift the entire island of Manhattan into orbit — just to kind of show you how tough he is. But the weird thing is, what I started to talk about before, the fan mentality is so strange with that stuff When Chris and I fell into one of the traps we fell into on the X-MEN — which was issue one, the villain beats the heroes, issue two the heroes beat the villains — the reaction would always be, to issue one, "Gee, the villain beat them. They must not be as tough as I thought they were." And then issue two, "Hey, they beat the villain. He must not be as tough as I thought he was." And so what I've been getting back to is this whole business that these villains are incredibly tough, or they wouldn't be coming back. And it must be really terrific for our heroes to beat this guy, because he's so tough. I think lifting Manhattan into orbit tended to indicate that this guy was tough. It's impressive when the FF beat... actually it was Galactus who beat him.

JIM: *Well, a nice little bit in #242 was the play the actors were performing*

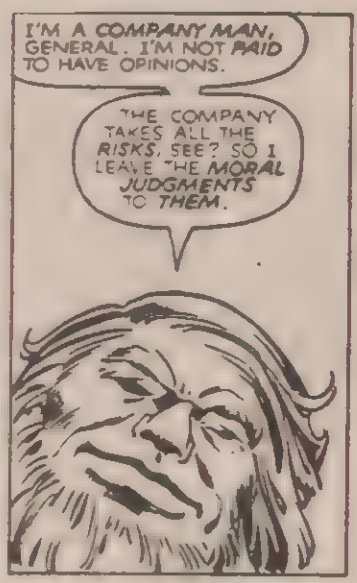
JOHN: ELFQUEST. I got a bunch of letters from people who realized what it was, and I got a wonderful letter from **Richard & Wendy Pini** which, of course, I printed. But I got one letter from one guy that didn't come until after the letter column was done — I would love to have printed it, and then run Richard and Wendy's letter right after it. This guy was going, "Why you ripped off ELFQUEST, you scum. If you can't write something original why don't you get out of the business?" *(Laughter.)* Gee... I didn't think *anybody* would notice I'd ripped off ELFQUEST.

JIM: *Now there's going to be a Marvel ELFQUEST reprint anyway — are there other non-Marvel books you read regularly?*

JOHN: I don't read much of *anything* regularly. I sort of skim, or skip and toss the stuff, hit different stuff. Right now I'm really enjoying, on the basis of two issues, MEGATON MAN from Kitchen Sink.

JIM: *That's with the Megatropolis... ?*

JOHN: Yeah. I think it's great. I thought the first issue was flawed in that the satire was too specific, in that it was very much Marvel 1968 — I showed it to my wife and I was


I'M A COMPANY MAN, GENERAL. I'M NOT PAID TO HAVE OPINIONS.
THE COMPANY TAKES ALL THE RISKS, SEE? SO I LEAVE THE MORAL JUDGMENTS TO THEM.

falling out of my chair, and she didn't laugh *once*. And I showed her the second issue and she thought it was a riot, the second issue is funny in and of itself. You know, it's not funny because it's satirizing old Marvel stuff. In fact, it almost seems that some of the stuff in there might be satirizing things *I'm* doing *(laughter)* with, uh, you know, the Human Melt-Down going off with Yarn Man's girl friend at the end Although I don't understand why Yarn Man isn't called The String. *(Laughter.)*

JIM: *Probably just didn't think of it.*

JOHN: They must be doing it just to frustrate *me*. I *know* that

JIM: *Well speaking of parodies of* you, *there was a DESTROYER DUCK that had a interesting character. What was his name... Cogburn or something... ?*

JOHN: Really? I hadn't seen that one. I saw myself as Company Man in E-MAN, and it seems that there's something wrong with the intellect that ridicules somebody for wanting to be a supporter of the company that he works for. I feel like I would never hire anyone if that's their attitude — that you cannot support the company you work for. If I was a company exec, I would want people working for me who believed in what I was doing, and who supported what I was doing 100%. Because if you *don't* get that, you don't get the package that you want. And I think that a lot of what was wrong with Marvel in the Seventies was that we had too many people working for us who said, "It's all going to go away in five years, it's all going to dry up and die, we're just putting in time until we can go and work in movies." And as a result, the books looked exactly like they were being done by people who were just waiting for something else. Comics were imagined to be the stepping stone to something else

JIM: *Well, that was also because whoever was in charge during that particular period was condoning it.*

JOHN: Um hum.

JIM: *Now, for better or worse, depending on one's opinion, there are certain standards, certain goals and objectives that people must attain. And also there are more ways than before in which people can profit from doing more. I mean, whatever satisfaction there may have been before, knowing that you did a job that was well received by the readership, the editors, and sold well — there must have been some sense of frustration that someone who was not putting in half as much effort was equally rewarded.*

JOHN: My whole point has always been that one is aware of that coming into the business. If you're going to be frustrated, don't come in. If you can't take the heat, stay out of the kitchen.

JIM: *If you don't like Marvel Comics...*

JOHN: Don't work for them. Or don't buy them. It's all well and good to say this situation stinks, and work to change it. The attitude when I was doing my company man number, the attitude seemed to be, "This *stinks*, this philosophy *stinks*, I don't like it,

Booster Cogburn (get it?) from DESTROYER DUCK by Steve Gerber & Jack Kirby.

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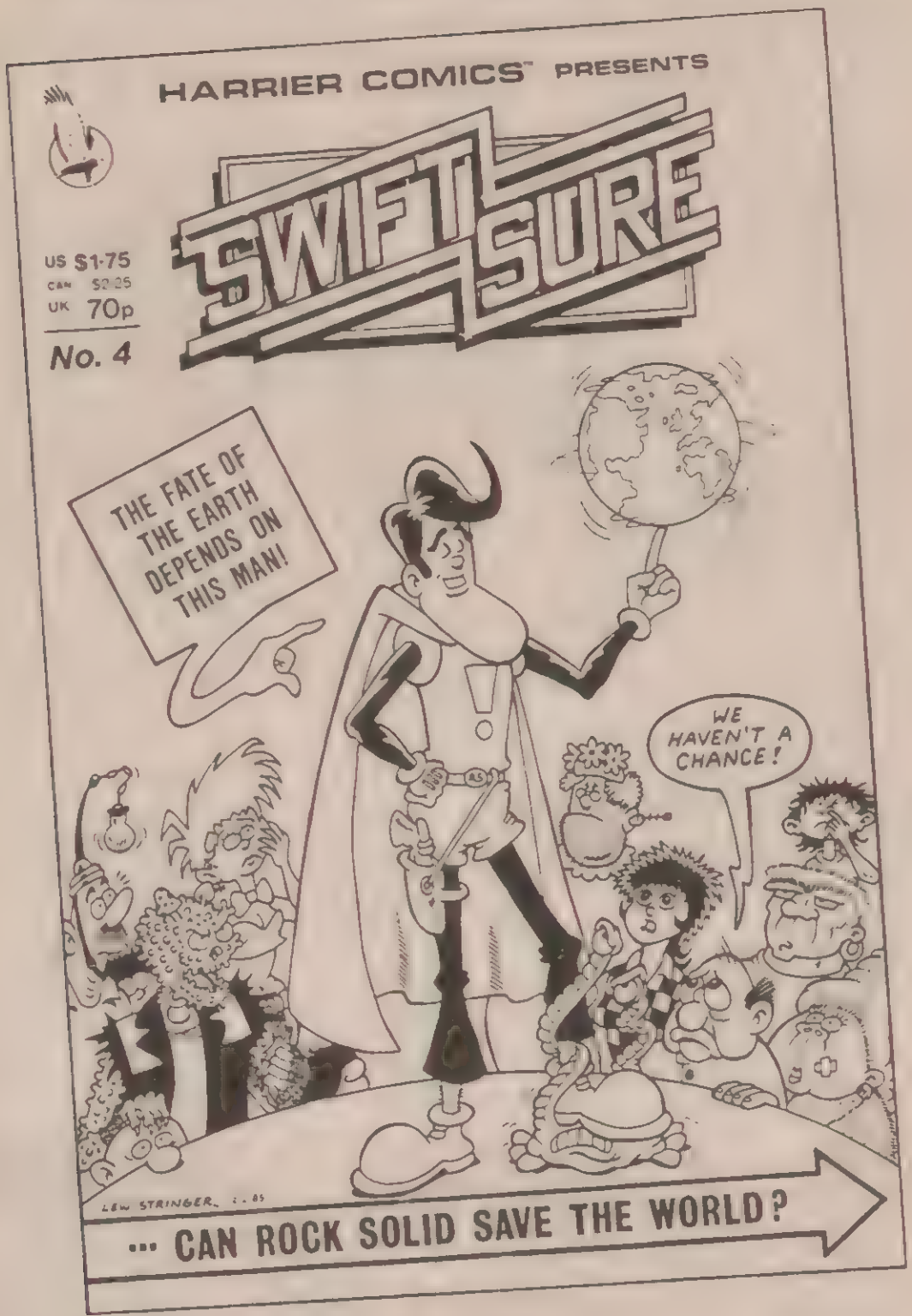
IN AUGUST, WE'RE HOT:



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...AND HIRE OUR OWN PRIVATE "S.W.A.T.-TEAM" TO DO THE JOB JASE WAS SUPPOSED TO DO

Marty Pasko & Joe Staton's "Company Man" — among others — from First Comics' F-MAN #3.

I'm not going to do my best work until it changes." And of course, it isn't going to change that way. My point was to say, "I don't like this, I'd like to get more money for what I'm doing, I'm going to *continue* to do my best work because, goddammit, we've gotta *sell* these things, we've got to make the money, and I'm going to *prove* to the company that it's worth their while to give me the bonuses." So, yeah, I make seven times what I made when I wrote that thing — for whatever it was, COMICS SCENE — that got me all this flak for being a company man. The weird thing is that the people toss me that as an insult, "Hey, Company Man," and I say, "Thank you," because that's what it's all about, if you want to be successful at what you do, you have to do it one hundred percent. I remember reading something, I think it was by **Marty Pasko** — if it wasn't you Marty, I'm sorry — saying that what we had to do was give the company what they paid for, so if they were paying us ten dollars a page, we give them ten dollar's worth, and then if they gave us more, we'd give them more. And the fans would support us in this. And I remember thinking, "You bet!" *(Laughter.)* Have you ever got a letter saying your old stuff was better? Probably not, or you wouldn't have this philosophy. What the fans want is the very best stuff you can produce, and they're not going to sit there and say, "Sure, I will continue to buy six years worth of crap because I know I'm going to be rewarded at the end of this six years with great stuff once these guys start getting the money they're deserving." So whoever it was who said this, I was just *astounded* by that philosophy. You *cannot* change things by blowing them up. It's like Prohibition: "We'll outlaw this stuff" — all it does is make it worse. And then the people who are making it worse are used by the people who established it to prove that it was necessary in the first place, and you get this vicious cycle going. It's like making marijuana illegal, so all it becomes is something that people do *because* it's illegal. So I say no, you have to do the best job you possibly can in every instance, *and* work to improve it. But I remember, you know, when they formed the guild, and people were saying this would give us the power to strike, and I was saying, "Are you out of your minds?" That's not the way this industry works. For one thing, take a look at MARVEL TALES which, back then, sold as well as SPIDER-MAN. In some cases, better. If they can sell a reprint better than the current stuff, don't strike, because they've got forty years of reprints in the drawer, and all we need to do is show them that they can get along without us.

JIM: *Um hum.*

JOHN: That is no longer the situation, of course

JIM: *Not at every company.*

JOHN: Not at every company, no.

JIM: *You seem to be contradicting what you said earlier about the fans. In this particular case, the fans are pretty good guys, because they're —*

JOHN: Well, in this case I should say the readers, not the fans...

JIM: *I had a feeling...* (Laughter.)

JOHN: I'm going through a period where I'm trying to force myself to use the two different terms. But even the Really Hardcore Fans are not going to put up with us if we don't give them the best. I mean, one of the earliest letters I got on IRON FIST was from a kid who didn't like what I had done and said, "Your old stuff was better," and I had done maybe four issues at that point. Fans are notoriously fickle, capital-"F" Fans. Readers are probably fickle — fickle is the wrong word — more selective, because if something turns into garbage they're not going to buy it. They're not going to buy their favorite character being done badly. As I didn't buy that issue of the FANTASTIC FOUR because I didn't like the Invisible Girl's face on the cover. So

JIM: *I think what made it more controversial — I don't have the columns you wrote in front of me — was you enjoyed being a small cog in the Mighty Marvel Machine.*

JOHN: Or a Big Cog

JIM: (Laughter.) *Also, in response to all the talk about creators' rights, I think you did a guest editorial somewhere, "What about creators' wrongs?" which struck me —*

JOHN: Yes, that's because I have — for not being a Christian — I have a pretty strong Protestant work ethic. And I believe that you should be *paid* for your work, and you should work for what you're paid for. There's too much philosophy these days of doing as little as possible to get as much as possible. And my whole point was — it was based on Gerber suing Marvel over HOWARD THE DUCK — I felt there was something wrong in that whole picture every time I looked at it. "Why is he suing only for the Duck, if he's concerned about his creator's rights? Why isn't he suing for OMEGA and all the other stuff he created? Why specifically for the product he or the fans perceive as hav-

normalman LEARNS WHAT THE "MAGIC" IS...

...GUESS WHO TELLS HIM!

normalman 10

Featuring a special guest appearance by
CEREBUS (written and drawn by **Dave Sim**)
from

Renegade Press

"The noise now is about the return of art."

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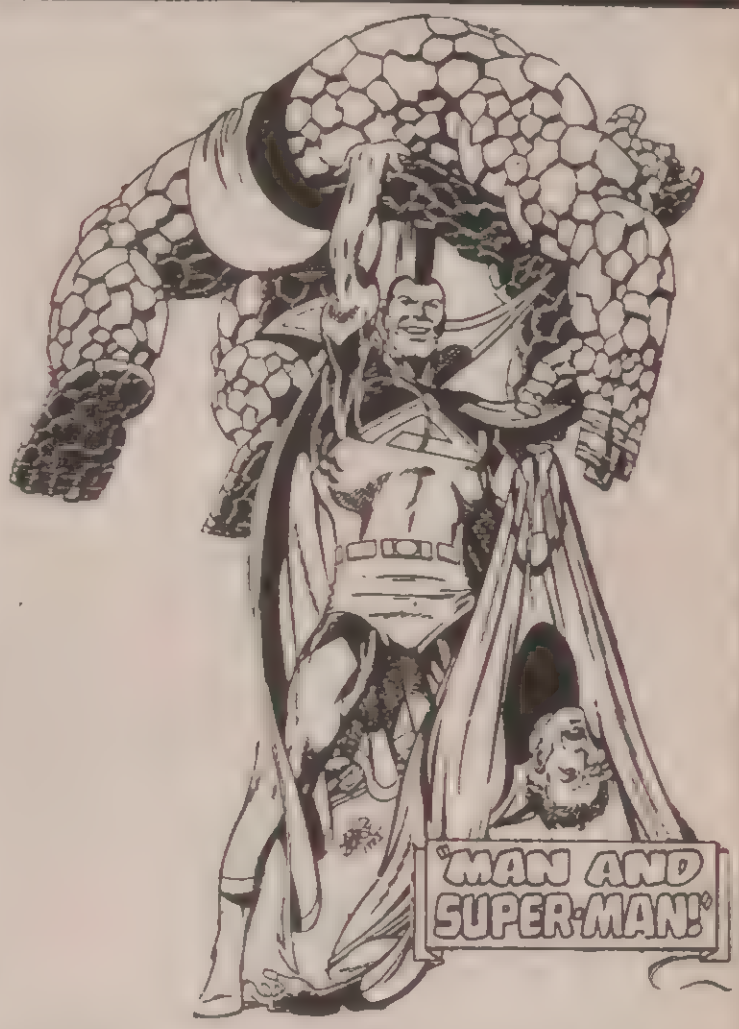
...ng been successful? And where's Val Mayerik in all this?" I don't know what the exact details of the situation were. I may be totally misreading this. But that was the gut reaction that I had, which started me thinking that in so many instances, it seemed to be a situation of people saying, "I want to *own* what I'm doing — but, bracket, only if it's successful, close bracket." If it's not successful, the company can have it, and the company can take the loss. And certainly the company can *afford* to take the loss, there's no question that Marvel makes millions of dollars and if it loses a hundred thousand it can certainly take that loss better than your average Joe Writer can. But, to use an analogy again, I was in a video store back in Evanston just before we moved, and some teenage kid had come in and slammed the door and shattered the glass, set off the alarms, and the guy who owned the store was reaming this kid out because he was going to have to buy a new door, and have a new alarm system put in, and the kid's reaction was, "So what, you can afford it."

JIM: *Um hum*

JOHN: And the point is not that you can afford it, but that a wrong has been done here. And I felt the same way — if you produce a character who is a big success, then you are entitled to a piece of it, and if you produce a character who *dies*, then you take a loss. Just like anybody else. And now the system is almost structured that way, in the fact that if ALPHA FLIGHT had been a dud, I wouldn't have gotten any royalties on it. I would still have been paid up front, for my work, but that seems fair, because I do "x" amount of physical work, and then the big bucks come out of the residuals, or the royalties, or the incentive or whatever it's called this week. And so it's almost a fair system now, in that sense that you *do* take a loss if the thing doesn't do well.

JIM: *From the very beginning, I could never think of a single instance where Marvel ever misrepresented itself, where they said, "Hey, create characters for us, if it really hits, you'll be a millionaire..."*

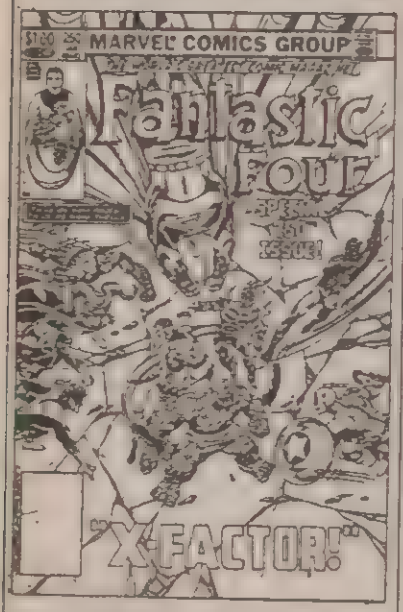
JOHN: The noise that's happening now, an extension of this, is the whole business about the return of artwork. "You mustn't sign the release that says that Marvel owns the artwork and is returning it to you out of the goodness of their heart." And yet, to me, what else is the situation? Marvel has *bought* the artwork. It's *their* characters, it's *their* stories. It's the equivalent, to me, of **Michelangelo** coming along a few weeks after the Sistine Chapel was finished and saying, "Well, I have to take it all down now, I have to take it back to my studio, because it belongs to me. All you paid me for was one use of it." Marvel never, in any of my business dealings with Marvel, never misrepresented, never once. The whole point is, the point that I made, is that if you look at the whole picture, the people who have been screwed by Marvel seem to have been the people who have made the loudest noise about how they were going to be screwed by Marvel. It's almost like "the accused party commits the crime." Because, "Why not? I might as well because I'm going to get roasted for it anyway." It's like **Shooter** playing the villain these days, because he knows that he's going to get played up as a villain whatever he does.



I came into Marvel at a point when artwork was already being returned, so I took that as a given. I had to sign a piece of paper that said Marvel is returning to me the physical artwork but none of the rights inherent thereto, and that sure makes sense to me. I didn't create SPIDER-MAN, I didn't create the FANTASTIC FOUR — as far as I'm concerned *they* own them. When I do a story for the FANTASTIC FOUR, hopefully it's not a story that can be done somewhere else. It's not a *generic story*, as I call them. So it's a FANTASTIC FOUR story, which means Marvel owns it or it doesn't go anywhere... so I have no problems with it. And I had no problems with the fact that when I started with Marvel I was getting thirty-three dollars a page, and now I'm getting a lot more than that.

I came into it with my eyes open, I knew what the situation was... I knew I'd be signing away all my rights. It didn't even strike me that it was *wrong* to be doing so, until some other people came along and said, "Well, you know, we should maintain the rights to this and this and this," and I sort of thought, "Okay, it *would* be nice if we kept the rights to the characters we created." It would be nice if we got royalties on the sales, and all that kind of stuff. And all these things have come mostly because of **Shooter** working for them for us. It seems that so

"The Warlord. I think that's probably the



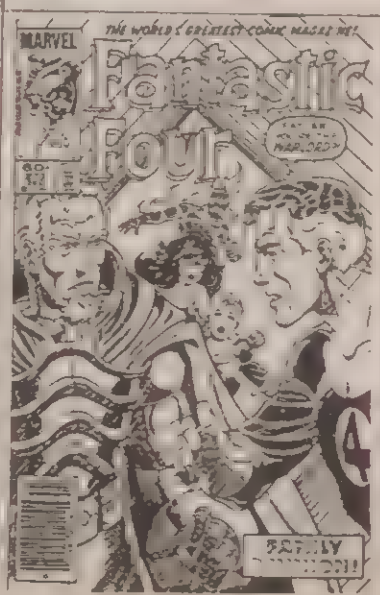
many of the people who made the loudest noises went into it saying, "Well I *know* that this is how it's been for forty years, but do you really mean that that applies to *me*?" *(Laughter.)* And my reaction is, of *course* it applies to you! It applies to everybody — and okay, let's change it, and let's change it for everybody. But until we change it, it still applies.

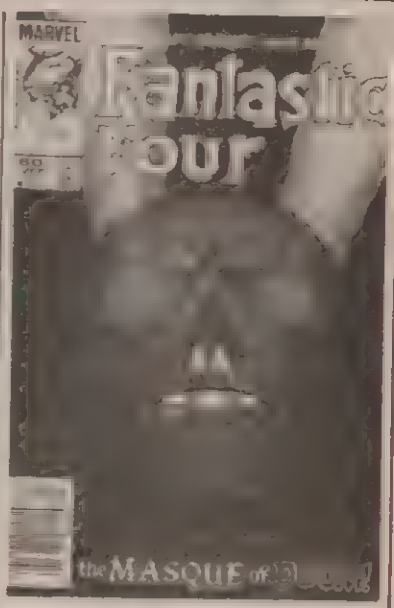
You don't prevent Prohibition by going out and getting drunk every night, because all that does is show the Prohibitionists that there's a *need* for it, and you don't legalize marijuana by getting five hundred people to go and sit on the steps of the Congress and smoke marijuana. That just convinces Congress that there's an awful lot of people out there abusing this stuff, so it should be illegal. And if comics are screwed up, then you work to change it from within. But throwing stones at the house from outside doesn't change anything except to make the people in the house want to arm themselves even more.

JIM: *After the royalty program had been successful for both sides — and those are the type of deals that are successful, when both sides benefit — someone who is normally cast as a villain, Barry Kaplan, the Vice President in charge of financing, suggested a sliding scale on the royalties! His thinking — how can I get more money for this company; how can we get the sales to go up even more? Well, we'll give 'em more money if the sales go up, and of course Marvel's going to get more money this way. So it's just a matter of maturity in terms of any sort of negotiations. Much of the tone of prior negotiations, if you can call them that, was just a lot of bitterness. People saying, "This is all wrong." Yet, at the same time, what were they doing? None of it made any sense. On the one hand, there were a lot of people complaining that the company saw itself as Big Daddy and they wanted you to be like children, and well, these people were* acting *like children.*

JOHN: Yeah. And also, let's try and find a business where more emotionally retarded people — and I'll include myself amongst them — work and make a lot of money. Because if we were out there in the real world, we wouldn't be getting away with doing all these funny little cutesy stories every month about these stupid characters with these weird powers. I mean, this is a hell of a lot of *fun*, and the very fact that doing comics for a living is an awful lot of fun and is an awful lot better than working for a living balances out — in my mind, at least — a lot of the shit. You say okay, so we don't have this, and that, and the other thing — we got all this *neat* stuff.

And now, start adding to the neat stuff what we can get now. We've got the royalties, and I'm making seven times what I made when I got married — which is only four years ago. A lot of people these days are now making the noise that the incentives should cut in earlier... you know, it cuts in at a 100,000 copies now, it should cut in at 70,000 or 50,000... and **Shooter's** response to that is to say, "Leave it the way it is, and we'll just *sell* more, let's sell more, and you'll be picking it up down here, instead of back here.' 'Cause if you start backing it up, they're liable to put a ceiling on it. We could, if we manage to get through the Nineties without the traditional ten year slump — which really doesn't have to be traditional — we could be selling a million copies by the end of the Nineties. Of every book. And if we're selling a million copies and my royalties cut in at 100,000, you watch me only doing one book a month... you watch me doing one book a *year*, if I'm going to make ninety thousand dollars in royalties on a given book. So it all comes... and the funnny thing is that *none* of it, to my conception, has come from the bitching and moaning. It's come from people like **Shooter** who've worked for the changes within the system. Because **Shooter**, the great maligned monster who dwells in the editor-in-chief's office, has always been fighting for the little guy. He's fought for me when I was a little guy; he's fighting for me now that I'm a *big* guy. *(Laughter.)* I never had a difficult time making a living when I was in comics. When I say I'm making seven times now what I made four years ago, it means I'm making a *hell* of a lot of money now. 'Cause I was making a *decent* living then. I've never had problems. Never had a problem at all making a decent working living, even *better* than a decent working living in comics. And the reaction that I get from people is, "That's because you do *eight* books a month." And all I can say to that is, "Then if you *can't* do eight books a month, you're in the wrong business. You know what the structure is, if you know that to make a decent working living you have to produce 'x' amount of work and you *can't* produce 'x' amount of work, then you're in the wrong line of work, chum."





JIM: *Back to the FF in #265, the one where She-Hulk really came in...*

JOHN: Right, yeah..

JIM: *In the same issue, the story before it was an FF story...*

JIM & JOHN: ...without the FF.

JOHN: Well, it was about the *fifth member*. The old Baxter Building had become a fifth

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weakest story that I've done so far."

member of the Fantastic Four, really, over the years

JIM: *In #266, you only pencilled the framing sequence, Kerry Gammil pencilled the main story. What was the secret origin of that story?*

JOHN: **Jo Duffy** had commented that somebody who wore a lot of makeup was "cosmetically aware," and I also resurrected a story that I did for that strip that I did in college. The Gay Guy thing . . . I re-did that story, basically. Karisma started there

JIM: *Aha! I didn't know that*

JOHN: What was funny, too, was that all I did in the plot was describe vaguely what Karisma should look like, and Kerry drew *exactly* the same woman that I had drawn twelve years earlier in the strip

JIM: *And there are some who say you're not a writer.* (Laughter.) *In #267, Sue has a miscarriage. That must have got a strong reaction*

JOHN: Well, the major negative reaction was from people who didn't realize that I'd planned it all along. I'd been very careful at conventions and whatnot *not* to lead people astray. Everybody'd been saying, "Is it gonna be a boy or a girl?" and my answer was, "You'll find out when Reed finds out . . ." So I'd *never* come right out and say, "A boy." Or, "A girl." A lot of people seemed to think that at the last minute I decided it would be more dramatic to kill the kid but, you know, the story was presented to **Tom deFalco**, when he was the editor, saying, "I'd like to have Sue get pregnant again and lose the baby." Mostly to underline my whole thing about how *wrong* it is for superfolks to have babies. And it was to underline, too, that the FF shouldn't have any *more* kids

JIM: *As for #268, Don Thompson's still trying to figure out the pun involved in "The Masque of Doom." Wanna explain it to him?*

JOHN: NO! *(Laughter.)* I *refuse*. I refuse to explain it. If he can't figure it out for himself, I refuse to explain it

JIM: *Also, the photo cover, was that your mask of Dr. Doom?*

JOHN: No, it wasn't. It's the official Marvel costume mask of Dr. Doom.

JIM: *Oh, right, right*

JOHN: It actually started when I first saw the Doom costume, "I should use this." The Doom mask.

JIM: *In #269 you use photos in some panels of New York City. Ed Hannigan was asking how you did it — the technical process? You seem to have great photos of New York.*

JOHN: Well, I have a whole bunch of books on New York, and what I usually do is take several photos so I'm not plagiarizing anybody, and I take selected buildings, and I Xerox several copies of it — a copy of a copy of a copy — until it becomes high contrast, and then just paste it in, and in some instances I will run the art paper through the machine, so that the image is actually printed onto the paper. What's interesting is, in the issue titled "Tell Them All They Love Must Die," I didn't do any photo backgrounds. I drew all the backgrounds. I indicated to **Jerry Ordway** to keep 'em rough so they look like photo backgrounds, and in nine panels out of ten they *look* like photo backgrounds. It's really incredible, he did a beautiful job

JIM: *Well, Ed was very jealous; he didn't know whether you had the photos and you worked the story into them, or you just came up with places and were able to find . . .*

JOHN: Well I've got a *ton* of books, and if you look at those things you'll find that most of them are *not* true pictures of New York, in fact, in one of the shots in the She-Hulk thing you can actually see the crease in the page, where I put the things together and I forgot to blank it out. *(Laughter.)*

JIM: *Also, around #269, #270 . . . that was Terminus. How'd you come up with him?*

JOHN: Terminus? Having, I hope, justified Galactus, I felt that there was room in the Marvel Universe for a Galactus of the type that, say, **Gerry Conway** had written, who was the sort of cosmic scumbag

JIM: *Um hum.*

JOHN: You know, there *is* room for that character — it isn't *Galactus* — so what I set out to do with Terminus was to create *that* character. You know, that sort of cosmic marauder

JIM: *Then Mike Carlin became editor another editor for you to train . . . #271, that was the Reed and Sue issue that was set before they became the Fantastic Four. When you were talking about your crude inking style, that would almost have to be . .*

JOHN: Well, that was where I took it to, right back to where it was coming from deliberately mimicked that particular style. It was successful for *me*; I don't know how much the fans liked it

JIM: *I liked it . . . #272, #273, that was*

JOHN: The Warlord

JIM: *Two hundred and seventy-seven issues we finally got to see Reed's father*

JOHN: I think that's probably the weakest story that I've done so far. That was in transition between editors; that was done when **Budiansky** had negated a bunch of the stuff that I'd *wanted* to do in that particular story

The Baxter Building — may it rest in pieces.

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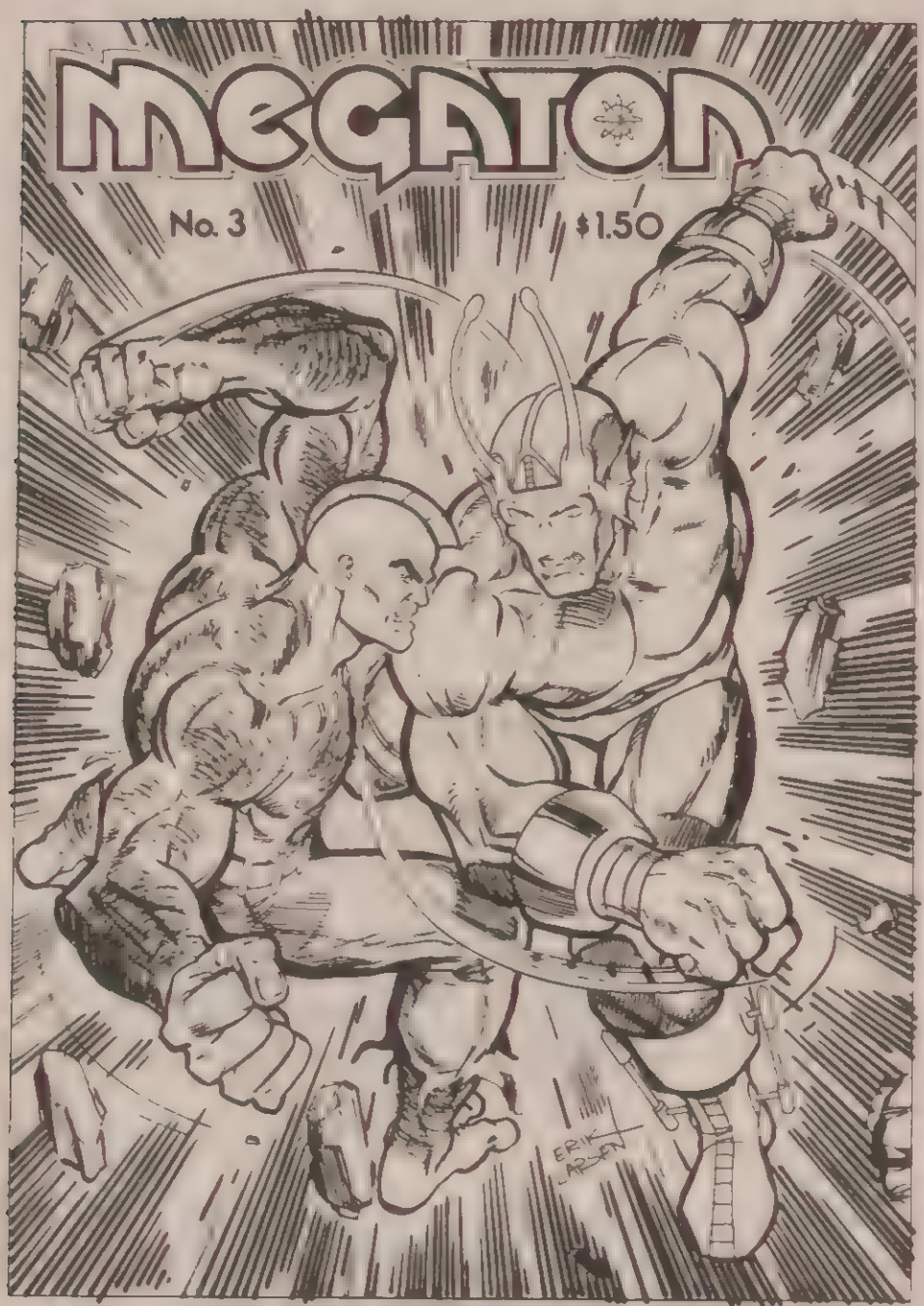
On Sale In October!



MEGATON

NOW BI-MONTHLY!

"I'm sick of fans saying Byrne's sloughing."

— told me *not* to do X, Y and Z — and so I found that, all in all, I really don't think it's a very good story. There's a lot of stuff there that I *wish* I could have said that I didn't, and I don't lay *all* blame at **Budiansky**'s feet. I'll take a lot of it myself. It's just not a good story. I think the stories have been getting back to what they were supposed to be, since then — certainly, the art work has

JIM: *Speaking of the artwork, in issue #274, the first one Al Gordon inked, it seemed like there were no blacks in it*

JOHN: I was experimenting

JIM: *A lot of people blamed Al Gordon for it.*

JOHN: I want to print one of the letters where it's blaming **Gordon** and make them understand he inked *exactly* what I drew, because I was experimenting with a style that was very different from what I'd done before — and coming out of that, I've come back more towards what I did before, but I kept elements of that. We have to change, we have to grow. And that was the first issue, and that was a dramatic thing. It was not a case of, "I think I'll start experimenting in this direction," it was a case of, "I think I'll toss the whole thing, and do *this*."

JIM: *I think you even had a blurb in one of the letter columns saying, "You're going to see a change in my artwork," or something... I thought that was real strange.*

JOHN: Well, I'm sick and tired, basically, of these hard-"F" Fans who say, "Oh, **Byrne**'s sloughing — remember when **Byrne** [illegible]

JIM: *Well they did get through to you! Did they convince you*

JOHN: It wasn't that they got through to me no. It's simply that I decided that *this* time if I was going to experiment, I'd let them know up front that I was experimenting. So maybe this time they'd allow me to do it without getting on my case. I'm so tired of reading letters in fanzines, and people's comments in editorials in fanzines, and people's comments in reviews in fanzines, saying, "You know, **Byrne** used to do such great stuff, and now he's sloughing off," and as I said before, this period of artwork that I was not pleased with, looking back on it, was some of the *hardest* work I've ever done. You know, I put more into that because I was putting *less* into it

JIM: *I understand. Well, I'll skip ahead #275, the She-Hulk. I'm sure everyone said you exploited the Miss America PENTHOUSE thing*

JOHN: That's what everybody thought, but of course anybody who understands how [illegible] there is really to this that story would have to have been *done* before we'd ever even *heard* of **Vanessa Williams**...

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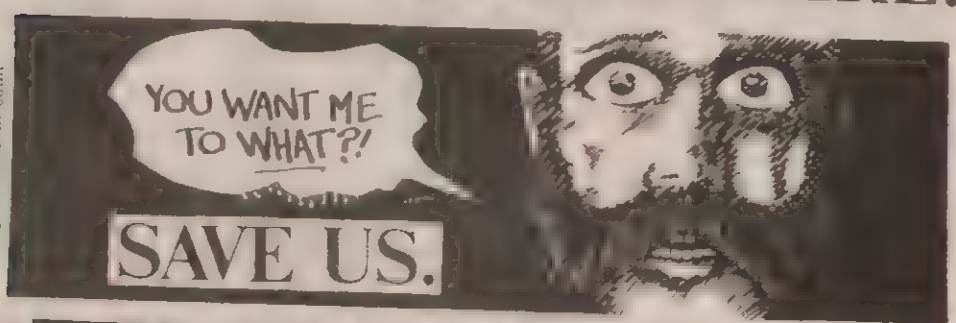
HEY LOOK!

THE ICE-MEN ARE HERE.



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5 issue limited series

MACKENZIE QUEEN

MATRIX GRAPHIC SERIES

NO.2 ON SALE SOON.

"Alpha Flight were never created to have a book."

JIM: *Well, was the line added in later?*

JOHN: The line was added in later. Because I couldn't resist the topical reference even though it *ties it to a point in history! (Laughter.)*

JIM: *Well, that's not the only example of that...*

JOHN: I've had people say the year. In the latest issue on the stands, Johnny says it's 1985.

JIM: *Jerry Ordway — #276.*

JOHN: I'd been trying to get him to ink stuff. Terry said he couldn't ink the ALPHA FLIGHT stuff, **Ordway** was the first person I asked. And of course I ended up inking it myself. I like Jerry's stuff. I thought it would look good on my pencils. I finally managed to catch him at a mutually convenient time; originally, he was only going to do six issues, but we managed to squeeze eight out of him. I really like his work, and I think it's some of the best inking I've had.

JIM: *When I first saw the originals I thought it didn't look right, but when I saw it reproduced, I thought it was the best inking you've had. He's kept a lot of you in it, and yet made his own contribution. Also, #276 was the black-and-white cover. And you introduced Reed and Sue's neighbors. What possessed you, John?*

JOHN: Well, I'd been wanting to do that scene for a long time. They'd moved into Darkest Suburbia and I thought I'd make it as suburban as I possibly could. Got some very good feedback from **Christopher Browne** on this.

JIM: *Oh, yeah?*

JOHN: He, in fact, wants those pages — I'm going to be trading him for a HI AND LOIS and a HAGAR

JIM: *I think back when we first were talking about it, you were thinking Dennis The Menace...*

JOHN: Dennis The Menace appeared a couple of times

JIM: *The neighbors' kid!* (Laughter.) *Okay, #277's going to be the last one, 'cause I haven't read #278 yet. However, you did something that directly affects me! I'm going to be editing THE SILVER SURFER limited series, and no sooner did the pencils come in on the first one, where we have The Surfer and Mephisto, than I read your issue where you killed off Mephisto. Tell me, how can we bring him back, John?*

JOHN: It's in there, it's in the book. Dr. Strange says, in that issue, that Mephisto did not create evil, evil created Mephisto. As long as there is evil it will not be long before Mephisto is reborn.

JIM: *Okay, SURFER won't be out until the end of the year, so evil will have sufficiently re-created him. But, uh, unless you want to talk about "True Lies," which I haven't read.*

JOHN: Well, "True Lies" was just my attempt to take all the different versions of Dr. Doom's origin and put them all in one line, chronologically, and make it all work. And also do a quick tip of the hat to the two different versions of what Dr. Doom's face looks like. Apparently, Jack wanted it to be just a small scar, yet because of Doom's vast ego his whole face was destroyed as far as he was concerned. So, in this particular issue, I have Doom take the bandages off in the hospital and we see his face, and there's just a scar on his one cheek, and when he goes off to the Himalayas — as in his original origin — they build the armor for him, they put it on, they put the mask on, it's still... hot! I figured if this guy's face was not scarred before — it sure is now!

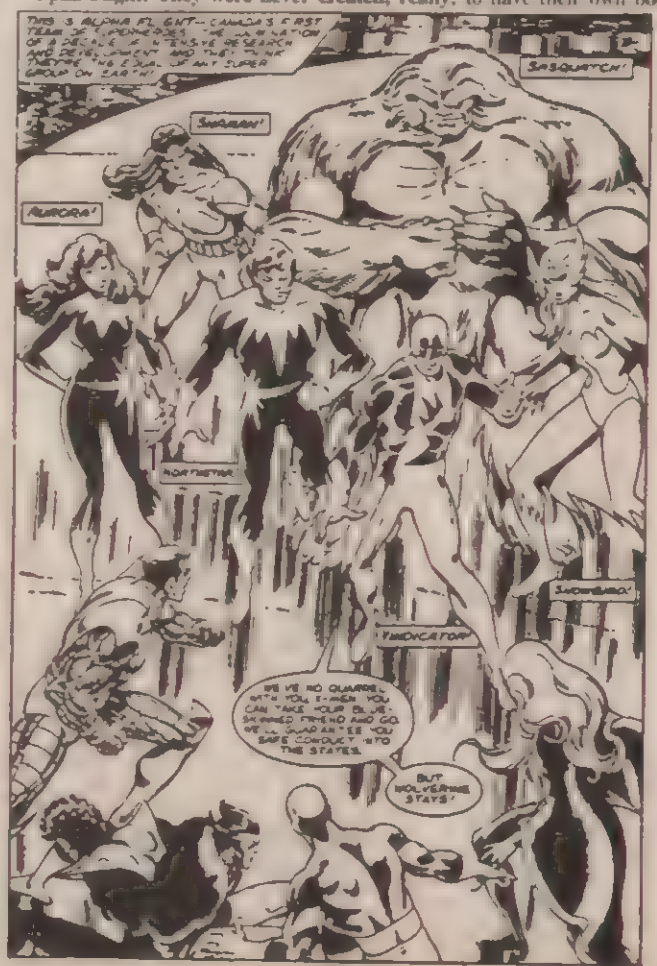
JIM: *So that takes care of that! We'll have to do another interview next year — we'll talk about ALPHA FLIGHT.*

JOHN: Talk about THE HULK.

JIM: *You created ALPHA FLIGHT in the X-MEN, but if you were to create new characters, would you want to own them?*

JOHN: Well, I partially own ALPHA FLIGHT. The reason that I created Puck and Marina was to justify the creator's percentage I'll get on the toys and all that. Certainly, I would like to own anything I create, but I have no objection to *not* owning things that I create in specific contexts. For example, unless they suddenly come out with millions of toys that are going to make millions of dollars I'm not going to get any of, it wouldn't do me a whole lot of good to own the rights to Spinarette. I *do* have some kind of ownership or whatever of Terminus. You know, they have the new deal — you sign a piece of paper, saying this is a character I created. If there is ever a Terminus doll, I get a piece of it. *(Laughter.)* One always wants to own what one creates, in the specific context where one can. This is in no way contradicting what I said earlier, because in that context you couldn't. If I was going to cre-

"If I was going to create characters now, I would create very different characters from Alpha Flight. They were never created, really, to have their own book."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"The only characters that had any spark at all were created by Stan & Jack."

ate characters now. I would create very different characters from Alpha Flight. I can say that. They were never created really to have their own book.

JIM: *The Last Galactus story in EPIC what's going on there?*

JOHN: That's chronologically the last Galactus story. After that story there's no Galactus in the context in which we understand him. It gets to sort of justify his existence once and for all.

JIM: *Well the comparison has been 'How dare you people put out a whole magazine that we want buying as to buy EPIC when we don't.'*

JOHN: Yes well, the whole thing is if they don't want it they don't have to buy it. You know, it's a hundred million years in the future, so it's not for them to affect Marvel's continuity.

JIM: *If there's an legitimate gripe at all it's probably that it would have been nice if you guys produced it at about the same time as and published it only when it was all finished.*

JOHN: You don't get more than six pages an issue of anything else in EPIC. That's the way that book is structured. It's all short stories, serials. You know, the American audience is not familiar with serials. I grew up in England with serials. EAGLE was a weekly magazine and you'd get one page a week and nobody was saying, 'Where's it should be two pages a week.'

JIM: *Tell me about the Marvel Press FF poster.*

JOHN: That started with the FANTASTIC FOUR CHRONICLES. They asked me to do a centerspread and a cover, so I did the cover and said, 'What shall I do for a centerspread?' And I'm somewhat masochistic, so I said, 'I'll do the Fantastic Four and everybody else!' And then I sat down and went through all the FFs and realized that the only characters that really had any spark at all were the ones that were created by Stan and Jack. So I cut it off with the end of the Stan and Jack run. The weakest character in there is The Monocle Lounger. And then the Marvel posters came along and they said, 'We want to do an FF poster,' and I said, 'Well how about this?' So we did some original drawing of it, we added the two characters that I'd cut out the first time around.

JIM: *Actually I'm not sure if you've already done an FF poster.*

JOHN: That's right. And, you know, colored it up. Added the staircase so the colorist could see these people had feet and things like that, and basically turned it into something more than what it was the first time around. So I think you can justify it as not being just a reprint.

JIM: *Even though I had absolutely no official authentic or anything in that, my suggestion was motivated by pure selfishness when that thing first appeared in black and white. I thought, 'What a waste! This is great! I mean, I wanted this thing, how could I get Marvel to eventually print this in color? I cannot behold!'*

JOHN: Well that represents three days of my life, so I'm glad to finally see it get colored. One cute thing about it, too, is we just took the originals and shot the FF figures to negative to make the new costumes.

JIM: *I keep dragging Ed Hannigan into this but his comment on the new costume was that it's look like nuns.* (Laughter.)

JOHN: Why not.

JIM: *The JUDGE DREDD story you did — was that the end?*

JOHN: Like JUDGE DREDD I mentioned to **Richard Burton** that I like JUDGE

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"I lost interest and it really shows."

DREDD, and he asked me if I'd like to do one, and I said sure. And so they sent me that particular story. I was — not to bitch and moan too much — I was very disappointed with the story. I kind of lost interest about three pages into it, and I think it really shows. Because all I could think of when I was doing it was, "Here's Mega City One's Number One lawman and he's been assigned to crowd control for a TV show." And I said the story I want to do is, "What did JUDGE DREDD *do* to screw up so badly that they assigned him to *crowd control* at a TV show?"

JIM: *Exactly. They just wanted you illustrating one. . . ?*

JOHN: Right, they didn't want me writing one, at that point. They don't know what they missed! *(Laughter.)*

JIM: *And that will be reprinted in color.*

JOHN: Wait 'til they see Judge Dredd vs Galactus!

JIM: *I'd like to see that. Uh, uh, okay. THE HULK. You're going to be doing THE INCREDIBLE HULK. John Byrne, here you go, you create ALPHA FLIGHT, and do, how many issues. . . ?*

JOHN: Twenty-eight

JIM: *. . . abandon your little children and do THE HULK! What's going on here?*

JOHN: Well, number one is the fact that ALPHA FLIGHT was not created by **Jack Kirby** and **Stan Lee** and therefore will never be a real comic book to me. There has not been *half* the fun doing ALPHA FLIGHT that there has been doing the FANTASTIC FOUR. Number two has been the fact that the general response from the fans and the readers is that I set out to do something *different* with ALPHA FLIGHT and they don't like it. And I think I can give them what they want on THE HULK, and I think **Bill Mantlo** can give them what they want on ALPHA FLIGHT. So we'll both save a title.

JIM: *Do you think it was because ALPHA FLIGHT wasn't a cohesive group every issue?*

JOHN: Yeah, yeah. That's the whole thing. Again I was listening to the capital-"F" Fans and I shouldn't have been. When ALPHA FLIGHT was announced the reaction was, "Oh, Gawd, another *group* book." And I said, "Okay, we'll give you something different. This is *not* going to be a group book, this is going to be individual issues of their own titles." And they didn't want it. The readers didn't want it. Because of my particular frame of mind on the book, I couldn't turn it into what they wanted. In fact, before my decision to jump to THE HULK, I was planning to turn it into something even *farther* from what they wanted. I wanted everybody to lose their powers permanently, turn it into a CHALLENGERS OF THE UNKNOWN. *(Laughter.)* I thought, "Gosh, the whole Marvel Universe is kind of getting restored to the Marvel Universe. I remember — is there any book I would like to work with? THOR is doing great these days, and he was kind of my next choice, what's next after THOR?" I thought, "THE HULK!" And what would I do if I was going to do THE HULK? And it was just as if a domino had been knocked over, because I instantly had fourteen issues, *woom! Woah!* Somebody wants me to do THE HULK! And so from then on — this is almost, must be close to two years ago — I went to **Carl Potts** and said, "Is **Mantlo** interested in leaving THE HULK?" and he said no. Once a month, from then on, I would pop in and say, "Is he leaving THE HULK yet?" No. .

JIM: (Laughter.) *You're not subtle, John.*

JOHN: I finally said, jokingly, "Well, maybe I should offer to trade him for ALPHA FLIGHT." And Carl said, "Well, why don't you?" So I phoned up Bill and said, "You want to trade for ALPHA FLIGHT?" And Bill phoned up **Mike Mignola**, called me back and said, "Yeah, let's do it!" So we worked out this crossover. And here I am, heading for the big green guy! So now I'll have the two oldest titles at Marvel.

JIM: *What are you planning?*

JOHN: Well, I want to get back to *basics*. I want to get back to the two elements of The Hulk that are the most *primal* Hulk, to me. One is the creature of the night — as he was in those early issues of THE INCREDIBLE HULK.

JIM: *Are you going to make him grayer?*

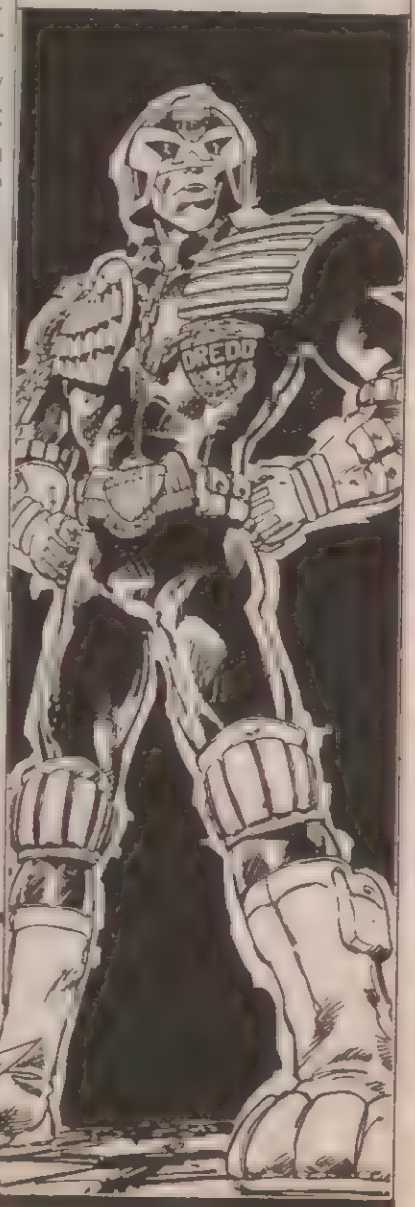
JOHN: Well, no. I. . . I want to get back to that lurking, hulking monster thing. And the other very primal thing that stays with me is him locking himself in that little room under the lake, until The Hulk is out of him and he changes back into Banner. And so, without giving away too much that I want to surprise readers with, and without stretching the character too far out of shape, I'm getting back to that. So that by about my eighth issue — I wasn't able to do it *instantly* as with the FANTASTIC FOUR — but by about my eighth issue, we will be back in a situation where he will be the creature of the night and he will be locking himself in the little room under the lake and pounding on the wall. And the *biggest* dramatic change that I'm making in the whole context of the thing is that since Rick Jones has more-or-less been taken care of, we're bringing in a new Rick Jones position, which will be filled by Betty Ross. And Betty and Banner will in fact be getting married, in something like the fourth issue. They actually get married.

JIM: *That stuff happens.*

JOHN: What a concept!

JIM: *How did you get involved in the Quest Probe project?*

JOHN: Um, I'm not really sure how I got involved. **Shooter** called me up one day and said, "We're doing this computer tie-in stuff, it has to fit into the Marvel Universe, would you like to do it?" And I said okay, so **Budiansky**, **Scott Adams** and I went out for



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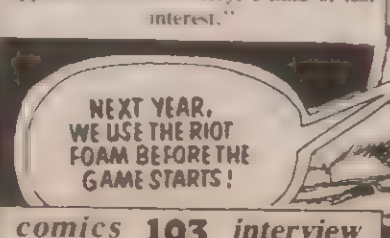

"I can't conceive of when I *won't* be doing the FF."

QUESTPROBE: "Three thousand dollars for twenty minutes' work."

lunch, and Scott Adams explained what he wanted and I realized immediately that what he needed was a static universe, and that would not *fit* into the Marvel Universe, because the Marvel Universe is changing. So I sat down and created something that *would* fit into the Marvel Universe as it now is. And basically made three thousand dollars for twenty minutes' work, which is really fine by me. I just plotted the shape of what's going on in the Quest Probe, and then the individual writers and artists work out the details for their particular characters.

JIM: *Someone just ran a quote of yours — I think it was kind of, "Work, work, work, that's all I do . . . " in some fanzine. I seem to remember a few years back you had some sort of health problem . . .*

JOHN: I was doing three books a month, which was approximately what I'm doing now.

JIM: *Uh oh . . .*

JOHN: And there were a lot of things crazy in my life. I had something very close to a nervous breakdown . . . what my doctor called it was a breakdown of the sympathetic nervous system. And what it comes down to is your body says to you, "You're working too hard, and if you don't stop you will have a heart attack. And this is what it will feel like." *Zap!* I was then doing three group books: X-MEN, AVENGERS and FANTASTIC FOUR. So I dropped, I think, THE AVENGERS, and I may have dropped the FF at that point. I'm not sure exactly what the chronology was. I wasn't doing any of the writing myself. So I was constantly depending on other people to feed me the plots and things.

JIM: *Like the plant from LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS.*

JOHN: Yeah, "Feed Meeeee." We were always chasing deadlines, and if the writer is late I'm late, and worrying about the mail and stuff. So everything kind of piled up. I was in Canada at that time. And the weird thing is that right now, I'm probably doing *more* work than I was then, but I'm doing it under so much vastly improved conditions. The mail is no longer a problem, and I don't have romantic problems to bother me.

JIM: *Not waiting on any writers . . .*

JOHN: Not waiting on any writers.

JIM: *Life is good?*

JOHN: Life is good.

JIM: *How about health?*

JOHN: Seems pretty good — I should lose weight. *(Laughter.)*

JIM: *So should we all. This is not a business that makes you look anything like the super strong characters you draw. What's ahead for the FF?*

JOHN: Let's see . . . we have a Dr. Doom story coming that's going to be the *real* Dr. Doom, making his return, and this is going to tie into SECRET WARS II — I believe it's going to be the *end* of Secret Wars II, and will create the loop that is necessary to put Doom into SECRET WARS I.

JIM: *Hmmm.*

JOHN: Um, what else is coming up? Johnny is gonna pop the question to Alicia, within a couple of issues — I will leave it to the readers to find out what her answer is. The Thing will be returning. The Thing returns, we have the 25th anniversary coming up, and the two major events that are currently planned for the twenty-fifth anniversary are the return of The Thing, and the unveiling of the new Fantastic Four headquarters building. Right now, we're thinking of calling it Fourplex.

JIM: *(Laughter.)*

JOHN: Kind of grows on you.

JIM: *Sounds good. American Flagg can drop by. But is it still a challenge? Are you still just as excited about the FF?*

JOHN: Every bit. I was saying to my wife just the other day that unless something really unexpected happens, I cannot currently conceive of a time when I *won't* be doing the FANTASTIC FOUR.

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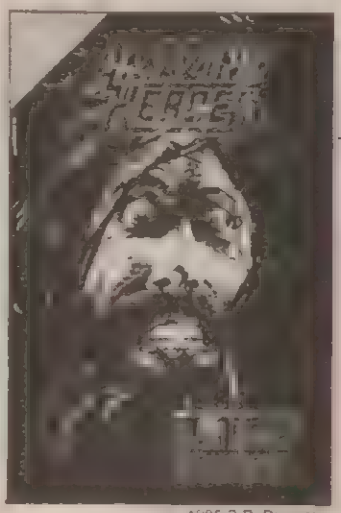

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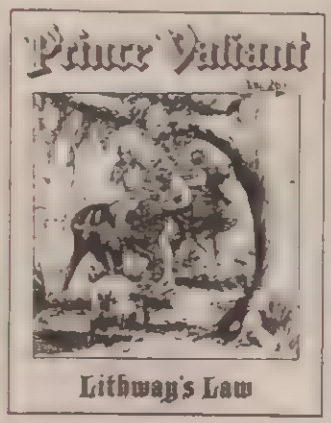

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LAST WORD

Comics Interview 234 Fifth Ave. Suite 301 New York, NY 10001

LENGTHY & REVEALING INTERVIEWS

Dear DAK

I think COMICS INTERVIEW is a great addition to such other publications as AMAZING HEROES and COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE. I truly enjoy the lengthy and revealing interviews with the interesting and popular people in the comics business.

John Stucker
2941 Webster Avenue
Minneapolis, MN 55416

SINGER: A SNAKE OIL SALESMAN?

Dear Dave,

While I do realize that you make no pretensions about being a news magazine, I would think that you would take a little more care in conducting your interviews. I am referring of course to the **David Singer** interview in issue #20. Your interviewer (or yourself, for that matter) cannot really be blamed, as **Singer** is, if nothing else, a slick customer. In an earlier day he would have made for a great snake oil salesman.

To wit: On page 51 **Singer** appears in a full page photo with his "date" **Cheryl Rixon**, and a "friend." Amusing is not the word for either the photo or its caption. First of all, the "friend" must have a name, yet we are not told. If **Singer** supplied the caption (I assume he did) why was he not asked the name? Why not give the "friend's" name? Was it sloppy reporting, sloppy editing, or merely more of **Singer's** "Why-tell-the-truth-when-it's-easier-to-bullshit-them" attitude? I suspect the latter

Shortly after this issue hit the stands, I received no less than three phone calls from former **Singer** employees informing me that **Singer's** date was actually the female to his left (the one identified as his "friend"); **Rixon** was simply window dressing at the party **Singer** arranged to have his photo taken and later foisted it on you. Nice guy, huh?

Also for the record, **Singer** is 29 years old. Whenever he is asked, he always says "After World War II" as if it is supposed to be funny. For some reason he doesn't want people to know his age. I'm not sure if he wants people to think he is older, or younger, but this answer only indicates that he is unwilling to either deal with or dispense the truth

Speaking of the truth, **Singer** is constantly attempting to dismiss the lawsuit of **John Carbonaro** as a "nonsense" suit. If this is so, why then did **Singer** create Lodestone (transferring assets of Deluxe to the new firm), and why is he constantly slandering John?

Had **Singer** been old enough at the time, he would have made a great media aide to the **Nixon** administration, as he certainly knows how to manipulate the press. I, for one, am constantly amazed as to how or why people constantly swallow his BS

I don't know if you'll print this letter, Dave, given the admitted animosity between **Singer** and myself, but I just thought you might like to know

Robert J. Sodaro
P.O. Box 1081
Fairfield, CT 06432

U.S. Senator Alfonse D'Amato (R-NY) with David Singer (and Lisa).

I'm printing your letter, Bob, to clear up a confusion about the nature of COMICS INTERVIEW. You acknowledge that we are not a news magazine, then go on to fault us for not, in effect, acting as a news magazine would

We print interviews, all interviews, and only interviews. Were we, in fact, writing impartial and objective news stories, you'd better believe we'd follow up on sins of omission. However, even if some interview subjects do slant the facts in their favor (a common enough human failing) — it would obviously be wrong to rewrite their statements or put words in their mouths . . . and it would run counter to the very nature of COMICS INTERVIEW, which is to bring you actual conversations with people in all walks of the comics industry and to let you judge what they have to say for yourself.

It should come as no surprise, Bob, that everything said on these pages is, indeed, biased — and you need look no further than who's doing the talking to see where it's coming from. That's the unique elegance and simplicity that COMICS INTERVIEW has to offer — we're not busy pushing a particular editorial position of our own, a hidden agenda — we're letting people speak for themselves, whether we agree with them or not

On occasion, that may rub some people the wrong way, but we respect our readers' intelligence and ability to recognize a self-serving statement when they see one. We are certainly not about to attempt imposing our viewpoints on the people we're interviewing

nor do we think you would want us to, upon reflection

Of course, in the event of disagreements, the "Last Word" is open to letters arguing, setting the record straight, or just expressing opposing opinions

And finally — thanks, Bob, for the opportunity to clarify what makes COMICS INTERVIEW the forum of preference for the entire industry, from writers and artists to publishers, retailers and readers. Like our slogan says, "We let the industry speak for itself."

—DAK

MARVEL CONTINUES TO DO A LOUSY JOB

Dear DAK,

I have read with interest the occasional issue of COMICS INTERVIEW ("occasional" because I would rather spend my money buying comics than spend it buying magazines *about* comics), but I read issue #20 and was moved to write a few lines.

As a long time fan of T.H.U.N.D.E.R., I really enjoyed the **David Singer** interview. Although I didn't agree with everything that **Singer** says, or does, or *says* he does (**Singer** should refer to **Kurt Vonnegut's** novel SIREN OF TITAN to see the difference between doing things *in* style and doing them *with* style), you gotta like the kind of guy who dates **Cheryl Rixon**, risks lawsuits, and still gets a child-like kick out of a character like Dynamo. I hope his T.H.U.N.D.E.R. books sell a million.

I also enjoyed the interview with **Keith Giffen**. I may be the only person in North America to publicly say this, but I never liked his work on THE LEGION OF SUPERHEROES. I do, however, put his work on AMBUSH BUG on my list of all-time favorites. I wish DC would give the Bug 1.) His own book. 2.) A regular back-up feature in ACTION COMICS or, 3.) Let **Giffen** do a regular series of 52-page Bug specials.

I particularly liked the interview with the Chambana Comix Club. I agreed wholeheartedly with nearly everything they said (especially the stuff they said about Marvel Comics) and I am glad to see that there are still fan organizations that don't take their fandom so seriously. I have met comics fans (and even some pros) who believe that comics are the most important thing in the Universe. I wish there were more fans like the ones in Illinois here in Wichita.

To answer the letter in the letters page by **Mike Swinson**, who wonders why "so many people are knocking Marvel," and, at the risk of generating more hate mail than I usually get, I would like to say that Marvel isn't being "knocked" because it is some sort of new fad. Marvel is being knocked because it continues to do a lousy job producing comics.

Sure I agree that DC isn't without fault and **Swinson** is right about their SUPER POWERS comics, but DC at least tries to play it straight with their readers. I know dozens of fans who wrote to tell Marvel about how disappointed they were with SECRET WARS and yet Marvel had the gaul to say they had no negative reaction to that series. I have never seen DC try to pull off such a transparent fraud. Marvel would much rather run a full-page house ad of TOP DOG than print a letters page full of angry letters.

Good Luck with COMICS INTERVIEW!

T.E. Pouncey
Witchita, Kansas

"WHO ARE THESE WEIRD NOBODIES?"

Dear DAK,

First, I liked the covers for #20 and #21. I thought both covers seemed, at first, "cool" in the **McLuhanesque** sense of the term (or at least as I understand it). Nevertheless, both "grew" on me after a while — whatever. I liked the SHATTER cover, found it very dramatic and intriguing. The T.H.U.N.D.E.R. AGENTS cover stuck me at first as being "ultra-cool"; instead of giant, primary-color-clad super-heroes comin' at ya, there's the more subtle approach of having the heroes in silhouette with their regalia up front to identify them. It's dramatic in an understated way. I like the color scheme. Anyway, staying with issue #20 — editorially, a good, even issue. Maybe I'm biased because it was the only thing in the isssue I was involved in, but I liked part two of **Arn Saba** best of all. Funny, amiable, but with some sharp comments that kept it from being "too soft."

Tom and Mary Bierbaum: A pleasant surprise. My first reaction was, "Who are these weird nobodies?" As I read it, though, I came to like what came through of their personalities.

Dave Cockrum: Okay. Good CI-type photo to lead off the interview. Like the dramatic Nightcrawler picture on page 27. On the whole, another pleasant read.

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S

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Keith Giffen Liked the layout on pages 30-31 — simple but effective, with lots of black. I wasn't wowed by the interview, but it was enjoyable reading.

Greg Theakston A *great* opening photo. Where normally this would be the interview I'd look at last, that photo got me to read this one first. I also enjoyed the interview itself — probably one of the better colorist/letterer interviews you've run, and with the exception of **Adrienne Roy** and her tattoo, the most interestingly illustrated.

David Singer: An *even better* opening photo! My first reaction was, "The Eighties for you — a nerdish-looking *schlub* like that gets to go out with the Pet of the Year." The intro says he's handsome, so maybe I'm wrong. I liked the interview and think graphically it's the best-looking one in the issue. Great layout on page 54-55, and a very striking page 57, with a great call-out.

Chambana Comix Club: I expected this to be uninteresting, but I was pleasantly surprised. Another good job from **Darrel Boatz**. Next to the **Arn Saba** interview, my favorite piece in this issue.

That letter from **Jerry Siegel** was terrific. And I'm glad you got the BlacJacMac picture in; I was hoping you'd use that later on in the letters column. Fetish art at its best. I also want to tell **Mike Swinson** that DC's SUPER POWERS actually had some bright, even inspired moments, due to **Joey Cavalieri's** dialogue, and to tell **Ken Meyer** that I saw **Colleen Doran** first.

Now to issue #21.

The **Mike Saenz** interview wasn't bad, but dragged in spots; too technical. I thought this might be due to my own lack of interest in computers, but I found the **Jon King** piece in the same issue pretty enjoyable. In the **Saenz** interview — or rather, in the midst of it — there was an ad for COMICS JOURNAL mentioning the death of **Gary Groth**. Did the pinko punk finally bite the dust, and if so, how — or was this supposed to be humorous?

Kelley Jones — pretty enjoyable. At first I didn't get the humor in the lead-off photo: I thought he was holding a security blanket up to his mouth. Now that I do get it, it's pretty funny. A fun interview.

Rick Hoberg — another good one: a bit overlong, but something for everyone. Great spread on pages 50-51: "Super-heroes — we've got 'em." Love that very striking BATMAN splash page used as an illo on page 53.

Jon King — as mentioned, I liked it somewhat to my surprise, after finding the **Saenz** piece had exhausted my small amount of interest in computers. (I'm not a technophobe; just not my bag, man, although it may become such in a few years.) Not very exciting illustrations, but it moved along fast enough.

Matt Jorgensen — my favorite piece in the issue. Der Ring comes through again. Good layout on pages 74-75 — I'm happy to see the MACHINE MAN mini-series get some publicity; I thought it was one of the best super-hero stories Marvel put out during the time I was reading comics for free as CI editor.

And **Paul Power** strikes back! Do you get the feeling he's torqued? My favorite thing in the letters column was **Jerome Wilson's** taunt to **Kimber's** statement that **Kelly Nichols** didn't know much about comics. I thought it was clear she knew quite a bit about comics, even [illegible] about other stuff. **Kimber's** letters always struck me as being silly.

I guess I liked issue #20 a bit more than #21, although as I said, I liked both well enough. I wouldn't rate either in the [illegible] up category of your CIs, but pretty good. I [illegible] of any bad issues of COMICS INTERVIEW..

Bill Chadwick
801 Myrtle Street
Atlanta, GA 30308

COMICS SECONDARY TO PORNO STAR

Dear DAK,

I wish that I could be as enthusiastic as **Mike Saenz** is over his virgin forays into the untapped world of computer-generated graphics. I've seen Saenz's work in EPIC and have enjoyed it. I cannot, unfortunately, say the same for SHATTER #1. It's not a book I'd purchase, but since I've read so much hoopla about it in the fan press, I took the time to carefully peruse it at the local comic shop. If this is the pinnacle of talent that the Macintosh 128K can demonstate then the public is in for a long wait before mass acceptance is reached. To me, in a word, the art looks cruddy. It's cluttered, dully colored and completely crude. Sort of the way the early undergrounds looked like.

I don't mean to hurt **Mr. Saenz's** feelings by expressing my distaste for his seemingly heartfelt goal of making this a major influence on the creation of comics. As a first effort, though, it should not be viewed as a promising of great things for the future. It seems more like a gimmick book, like 3-D, that First will use to jack up sales, than a truly revolutionary breakthrough. Lazy artists may appreciate this process, I doubt many discriminating fans will.

In response to **Jerome Wilson's** use of my name in the lettercol of COMICS INTERVIEW #20, let me just say the irrepressible **Miss Nichol's** involvement in the realm of comics, SF, and horror seems decidedly secondary to her life as a porno movie star and a skin mag model. I'm sorry, folks, but for me it's hard to take someone seriously who makes a living in such a sleazy industry. Many people, besides me, were probably aware of this and picked the issue up because of its exotic subject. No, Jerome, I haven't read any other interviews with her in any other publications, nor do I believe she's given any.

Gary Kimber
80 Searle Ave.
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Kelly Nichols and Jamie Gillis in Chuck Vincent's ROOMMATES.

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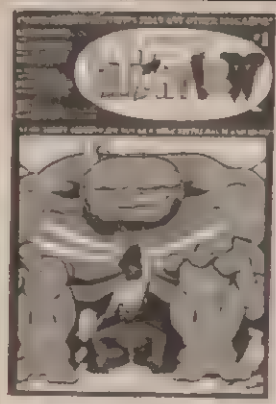

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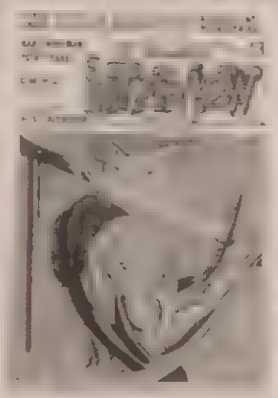

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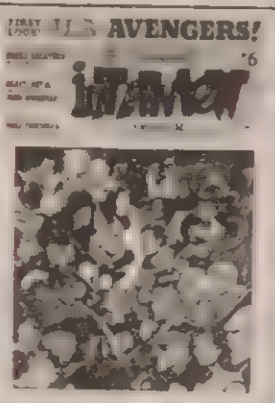

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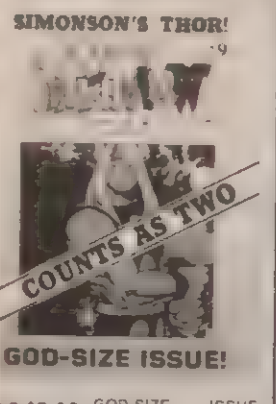

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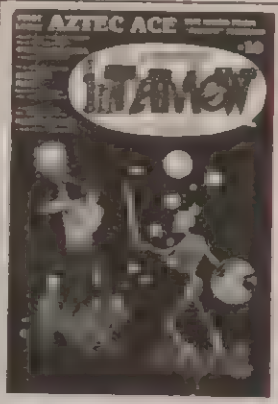

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ORDERED ALL BACK ISSUES & SUBSCRIBED!

Dear Sirs,

I recently picked up two copies of COMICS INTERVIEW at a local specialist shop and totally devoured the contents in record time. So impressed was I, that I have recently ordered all the back issues and subscribed.

Unfortunately, British comics fans only have two reliable newszines (to my knowledge) — these are FANTASY ADVERTISER and the COMICS NEWS MONTHLY. However, neither of these mags have in depth interviews like your INTERVIEW mag.

Another problem for your British readers is the actual cost over here. I realize this is caused by the dollar/pound war, but isn't there anything you can do from your end?

Anyway I would like to see an in depth feature on DC Comics' new CRISIS ON INFINITE EARTHS, as this may prove to be the year's best title (well, mine, anyway).

Also how about a few interviews with British writers and artists like **Alan Moore, Dez Skinn, Steve Dillon, John Rideway, Pat Mills,** et cetera (the list is endless).

Well, I hope COMICS INTERVIEW stays just the way it is, as I can't see any way to improve it. Keep up the excellent work, and don't forget your British buddies.

Peter Sidebotham
7 Marton Close
Lower Heath
Congleton, Cheshire
ENGLAND

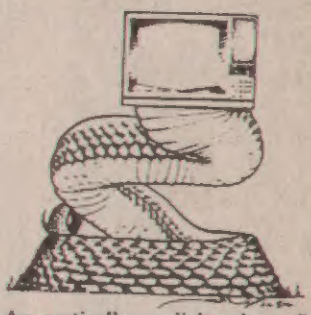
By now, Peter, you've received the complete COMICS INTERVIEW set, and have surely noticed that we were absolutely the first American comics magazine to interview Alan Moore (way back in issue #12).

Not only that, but we've taken care to chronicle the English comics scene all along, having carried all kinds of conversations with your fellow countrymen — from Nick Landau & Mike Lake of Eagle Comics and Titan Books (#7) to Richard Burton about IPC (#8) to, most recently, JUDGE DREDD/CAMELOT 3000 artist Brian Bolland with the surprise news about how readers may actually be able to help bring about a BATMAN/JUDGE DREDD team-up (#19).

Unfortunately, Peter, we can't do a darn thing about the value of the dollar versus the pound, since currency manipulation and monopolization is solely a government affair, no matter who they may be trying to shift the blame to this week — but we can grant your wish regarding the other CRISIS, as witness what's coming in the next COMICS INTERVIEW...

—DAK

SIMONSON & McGREGOR



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